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Literature

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THE FEAR OF BOOKS

By the Same Author:

The Anatomy of Bibliomania

The Eighteen Nineties

William Morris. A Study

Occasions

HOLBROOK JACKSON

THE FEAR OF BOOKS



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This book is complete in itself, but I like
to think of it as a part of its predecessor,

The Anatomy of Bibliomania.

H. J.

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THE FEAR OF BOOKS

THE FEAR OF BOOKS

PART I

OF BIBLIOPHOBIA, OR FEAR OF BOOKS

I. BIBLIOPHOBIA INTRODUCED

Being so much alive, as I have shown out of many authorities,¹ kin to man and the printed likeness of him, with *a potencie of Life in them to be as active as that Soule whose progeny they are*,² it will be no cause for surprise to learn that books suffer like perils and adventures, trials and tribulations, that they are subject to the same *slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*,³ as those which beset men in their ordinary lives; and as many observers in different ages have marvelled that so frail a creature as man should continue to frustrate the apparent conspiracy of nature to destroy him, so may we marvel that books have survived so many misfortunes and cheated their so numerous enemies. In this, perchance, they most resemble their creator, friend and enemy: preserving *as in a violl the purest efficacies and extraction of that living intellect that bred them*.⁴ *What a piece of work is man!*⁵ What a piece of work is a book! It is to the glory of books that ignorance and fanaticism are their enemies and that their history is disfigured with calamities, persecutions and neglect. It would require a whole

¹ See *The Anatomy of Bibliomania*. ² Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 17. ³ *Hamlet*. iii, 1. ⁴ Milton, *Op. cit.* 17. ⁵ *Hamlet*. ii, 2.

library to tell the tale of these misfortunes in full; so, after my plan, I shall not attempt it, but will content myself with advancing a few specimens as typical of the rest, and characteristic of the whole tragic business.

Bibliophobia is fear of books, and it will be found as this Part is opened up that most of their misfortunes may be related to that cause, whether its immediate effect be jealousy, hatred or envy, which are but concomitants of the main. Nor is bibliophobia confined to books *per se*, it is even more apparent in a fear of what books may do. *When Darwinism burst upon a frightened world, the fear most often expressed was that its materialism would shake the ethical foundations of society.*¹ But fear is always the basis of these perturbations, and among the more primitive minds it is often transferred from the effect of books to the books themselves: *Fear is the order of the day. To those very natural fears of bailiffs and tax-gatherers must now be added the fear of Reform, of Cholera, and of Books;*² but it existed long before the days of Mercurius Rusticus.³

St. Francis of Assisi forbade books to the brethren of his Order: books and the materials of study were incompatible with the vow of absolute poverty.⁴ Even Roger Bacon, when he became a Franciscan friar, had to abandon his books, and could not touch ink or parchment without special Papal dispensation. A novice asked St. Francis for leave to possess a psalter. The Saint refused: *When you have got a Psalter, then you'll want a breviary, and when you have got a breviary, you will sit in a chair as great as a lord, and will say to some brother, 'Friar! go and fetch me my breviary!'* And laying ashes on his head he

¹ Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* 170. ² Mercurius Rusticus, *Bibliophobia.* (1832.) 6. ³ Dibdin's pseudonym. ⁴ Brewer, *Monumenta Franciscana.*

exclaimed: *I am your breviary! I am your breviary!* He himself resists the temptation to possess books, and he looks forward to the day when men will cast them out of the window as rubbish.¹

Some thinkers, as Herbert Spencer in his later years, do not read books. *I have lost my taste for reading*, George Moore confesses, in his *Conversations in Ebury Street*, and, he says, *there are few greater misfortunes: to lose one's taste for reading is really like losing one's taste for bread*. Sir Walter Raleigh, who looks upon reading as *a makeshift for the lonely*, thinks he would not read at all if he could get good talk,² and finally cannot even read *Shakespeare*, not that he thinks him *a bad author, particularly*, but because he can no longer *bear literature*.³ Some believe books to be the stepping stones of degeneration. *Books*, says one of them, *are the first parents of boredom, and novels and newspapers are its immediate progenitors*.⁴ There are others who read little, but think much: *it is after all the ignorant* (observes one whom Lord Morley⁵ calls *the best read man of our time*), *like Pascal, like Descartes, like Rousseau, who read little, but who thought and who dared—those are the men who make the world go*; among the rest are *men who have lost themselves by reading too much*. Others, again, *who have read nothing but life*, sometimes shame even genius with their lucidity.⁶ Some observers fear that as we tend to *live less and less and to learn more and more, sensibility surrenders to intelligence*.⁷ But for everyone who has helped to make the

¹ *The Great Book-Collectors*. Elton. 30-1. ² *Letters*. ii, 355. ³ *Ib.* 396. ⁴ Anon., 'The Vice of Reading', *Temple Bar*. (1874.) xlii. ⁵ *Recollections*. i, 111.

⁶ Remy de Gourmont, 'The Value of Education', *Decadence*. Trans. Bradley. (1922.) 117. ⁷ *Ib.* 102. I find the same idea in Bernard Shaw's *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, Act ii. When Cæsar is asked to save the Library of Alexandria

world go without books there are a dozen who have made it go as well, if not even better, with them; and even bibliophobes like St. Francis, Pascal, Schopenhauer and the rest, would be unknown and their ideas forgotten but for books. Even a bibliophage must use books if he desire fame or influence, and for that reason a true bibliophile would not even reject Nietzsche when he argues those books to be negligible which do not *transport us beyond all books*, for, as George Moore observes, *it profits a man but little to have read all the books in the world if he miss life.*¹

II. ACTIVE AND PASSIVE BIBLIOPHOBES

It is waste of time for bibliophiles to marvel that their opposites should exist: the fact is too obvious, for where there is love there is hate lurking not far away, and the misobiblist is perchance no more than a frustrate bibliophile. Charles Nodier classes politicians and financiers as book-haters, and among them he places certain *grands seigneurs* of letters, which Derôme will have is a hit at Victor Hugo, who detested the books he had not himself written, and was not even sure that he liked his own except that they puffed up his pride and his love of gain.² Most people ignore books and despise readers; *of all the arts, literature is least to the general taste of the world;*³ and even many readers are so indifferent, so little concerned about their from destruction, he says: 'It is better that the Egyptians should live their lives than dream them away with the help of books.' *Three Plays for Puritans.* 135.

¹ *Conversations in Ebury Street.* 4. ² Derôme, *Les Editions Originales des Romantiques.* i, 214. ³ Andrew Lang, Intro. *Pleasures of Bookland.* Shaylor. xiii.

reading, that books are selected haphazard, by the title, the picture on the cover, or by superficial press comment, by any method indeed but the exercise of taste. *Circulating libraries*, says Lang, *lend their aid by 'sitting tight' when a book is asked for, by not supplying it, and by waiting till the public have forgotten the subject*; and, he adds, *they do not need to wait long.*¹ Some others resent both books and reading, and resentment often turns to hatred, for they are jealous of the quiet, irresistible influence of literature, not knowing when it may disturb their pet ideas or dispel the illusions which they have confused with life. Fear drives them to take cover in the dug-outs of dogma; and those of them most lacking in humour and self-knowledge lay the blame of their oppressions upon our supposed deficiencies; but if, like those dogmatists condemned by Glanvill, *their particular opinions are as assertive and dogmatical, as if they were omniscient.*² they invite scepticism and justify it, for it is plain that distrust pushed too far leads to Bedlam, as he says again, *superstitious fondness and fears are a real degree of madness.*³

May Sinclair boldly maintains that the British public has an *active distaste for unadulterated letters*,⁴ which many other observers support, for the mass of men and women would seem to be overcome with what popular jargon calls an *inferiority complex* in their approach to literature, preferring the worst, *the reflex poets and echoing philosophers*,⁵ and with a sort of self-righteous passion they justify their queer taste in public and peradventure brag of it: *Humility is a rare thing*

¹ Andrew Lang, Intro. *Pleasures of Bookland*. Shaylor. xxiii. ² *Vanity of Dogmatizing.* (1661.) 15. ³ 'The Usefulness of Real Philosophy to Religion', *Essays.* (1676.) 15. ⁴ Letter to *The Spectator*. 1911. ⁵ Swinburne, *Under the Microscope.* (1872.) 58-9.

*among the learned, but rarer still with the ignorant.*¹ Their habit is to despise the student and to discommend all serious reading. The stoics suspected studies and, saith Montaigne, *finde intemperance in over much knowledge,*² and Nietzsche puts the scholar among the decadent.³ But it is not from this class that the bibliophobe is generally drawn. He may be recognised instantly by his explanation that he is out to destroy or suppress books for the good of others, and to the glory of God: *the common excuse of those who bring misfortune on others, is that they desire their good,*⁴ but such hatred as they have is the brat of fear, and in turn it sires all those fanatical and superstitious acts which have imperilled books in every age and country.

It is necessary, however, to distinguish between the passive and the active bibliophobe. This section, upon which you are now embarked, will sufficiently set out the latter, whose disposition I have just now hinted at; but the other and more numerous though less harmful variety must now be discussed briefly, so as to dispose of him, for he is none of our concern, being for the most part so mildly opposed to books as to be innocuous. The passive bibliophobe hates rather than fears books, and he hates them so consistently as generally to avoid all contact with them, as worthy M. Chrysale, harassed by his *femmes savantes*, fights shy of all books,

your everlasting books
Don't suit me. Just save out a big old Plutarch
To press my neck-bands in, and burn the rest.⁵

¹ Anatole France, *Garden of Epicurus*. Trans. Allinson. 79. ² 'Apologie of Raymond Sebond', *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. i, 167. ³ *Ecce Homo*. Trans. Ludovici. 48. ⁴ Vauvenargues, *Selections*. Trans. Lee. (1903.) 174.

⁵ Molière, *Les Femmes Savantes*. Trans. Page. ii, 7.

He prefers sport, noise, gregarious and mechanical entertainment, and all these things, Lord Grey warns us, must make it more difficult for successive generations to acquire the habit of reading, and, if that habit be acquired, to maintain it.¹ No cause for complaint here. I do not know whether it would be fair to describe the ordinary man as a bibliophobe, says a recent observer,² but, he contends, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that from an early period there has been among the majority of human beings a deep-seated prejudice against books. It is safer to conclude that, no matter how many hate books, the majority of bibliophobes concentrate their dislike upon good books. The common or passive bibliophobe is a pervert with a passion for the worst books: what causes him far more alarm than the superabundance of bad books is the intolerable plethora of good ones.³

There are some who believe that bibliophobia may be caused by lack of bookish experience during childhood. Oliver Wendell Holmes holds that all men are afraid of books that have not handled them from infancy.⁴ I do not doubt that a wise introduction to books at an early age might immunize some men against bibliophobia, but familiarity is no sure remedy, for it is common knowledge that often those who have been nurtured among books rarely have the curiosity to open one. Schoolboys display a tendency towards bibliophobia, which is generally expressed in contempt of the more studious of their schoolfellows and sometimes by ill-treatment of them. Huet is of the opinion that this attitude is instigated by envy, and he speaks out of a painful experience, for

¹ Grey, *Fallodon Papers*. (Constable's Misc.) 13. ² Y. Y., 'Bibliophobia', *New Statesman*. 29:ix:1928. ³ A. L. Maycock, 'Bibliophobia', *Blackwood's Magazine*. Oct. 1929. ⁴ *Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*. (1902.) 20.

when his own *love of letters had excited the envy of his companions*, they did all in their power to hold up the studies of the future Bishop of Avranches. *My books, he says, were stolen, my papers torn, or wetted or greased so as not to bear ink; my chamber door was barred, that whilst they were at play I might not be lurking in my room with a book.* During the summer vacation it was held as a crime to take a book, and he was compelled to pass whole days playing or hunting or walking. In order to indulge his taste, for a bibliophile is not to be denied: he would rise at dawn and read whilst his companions slept, and later in the day he would escape with his book into a wood or other secluded place, but as soon as he was missed he was hunted down by the pack, who harried him out of his hiding-place with stones, or wet cloths, or by squirting water on him.¹

F. D. Maurice had known both boys and men who have looked at books with a kind of rage and hatred, as if they were the natural foes of the human species;² and to show that this hatred is not confined to the anonymous mass of men many an eminent author has looked upon books with dislike. *What do I care for first or last editions?* asks D. H. Lawrence, *I have never read one of my own published works*, he confesses.³ Richard Jefferies would not hesitate to destroy the deadening influence of tradition, especially that part of it enshrined in books. *Take a broom and sweep the papyri into the dust*, he exclaims; and he would do the same with the classics, for *certainly nothing could be less valuable.*⁴ Samuel Butler brags that he has *the smallest library of any literary man in London*. *I do not like books*, he

¹ *Memoirs of Huet*. Trans. Aikin. i, 13–14. ² *Friendship of Books*. i. ³ ‘The Bad Side of Books’, in *Bibliography of the Writings of D. H. Lawrence*. MacDonald. 9. ⁴ *The Story of My Heart*. Sixth Imp. 133–4.

says;¹ and now hear how so great a creator of books as Théophile Gautier hates them. *Je vous le proteste*, he says, *afin que vous le sachiez, je hais de tout mon cœur ce qui ressemble, de près ou de loin, à un livre; je ne conçois pas à quoi cela sert.*² I declare here and now, so that you may know, that I detest with all my heart anything in any way resembling a book; I cannot conceive what useful purpose it can serve. He expresses no more than the common opinion, inconsistent enough in one of his trade; but the rest of them, so long as they remain passive, are the affair of the reformer rather than of the bookman. The love of books is sufficient for itself. And if, as some people have held at all times; books are too abundant, *it is not for readers to complain; the remedy*, as Voltaire advised, *is in their own hands*: nothing forces them to read, and he rejoices that Caramel's plan for writing a hundred folio volumes, and employing the power of princes to compel their subjects to read them, has not been put into execution.³ Mussolini compels the Italians to do many things, says a writer of to-day, but he does not compel them to read Dante. If he did, such is the prejudice against books that, I believe, it would mean the end of the Fascist Revolution.⁴ The future of reading is best secured by our freedom to take up a book, without compulsion, as and when we are inclined. For the rest bibliophiles are not propagandists. They do not preach the love of books, they are content to enjoy it. To proselytise love is to pollute it. The bibliophobe, therefore, becomes a problem for bookmen only when he is active, as I shall now proceed to show.

¹ 'Ramblings in Cheapside', *Humour of Homer*. Ed. Streatfeild. 118. ²Pref., *Les Jeunes-France*. ³ 'Books', *Philosophical Dict.* ⁴ Y. Y., 'Bibliophobia', *New Statesman*. 29:ix:1928.

III. SUPERSTITIOUS SABOTAGE

A lamentable thing it is to consider how many myriads of books have fallen beneath the wheels of superstition. That word comprehends all: there being a superstition of knowledge no less than of ignorance. It has infatuated people in all ages, and all manner of folks have been besotted by its blind zeal. The bravest spirits of all times have suffered from the intolerance of zealots: Socrates, Anaxagoras, Theodorus, Protagoras, Epicurus, to name no more from ancient times. Since then, says Glanvill, *we know who was an Heretick for saying there were Antipodes; and a Pope was taken for a Conjuror for being a Mathematician; yea those noble Sciences were counted Diabolical; and even the Sacred Language could scarce escape the suspicion. In later times Galilaeo fell into the Inquisition for the Discoveries of his Telescopes; and Campanella could not endeavour to assert and vindicate the freedom of his Mind, without losing that of his Person.*¹ It is a pitiful sight to behold what tortures and miseries this intolerance has procured, what slaughter of books it has made, how it raged amongst those old Romans, Egyptians, Moors, Arabians, Hebrews, Ephesians, yes, and even our modern French, Italians, Germans, Irish, Scots, and English. Peignot has compiled a bibliography of books which have been burnt by outraged authority, religious and political; and there is another list of those which have *actually been pursued by the French police.*²

He that shall read but in *Blades* alone, of the destruction of great libraries, rare manuscripts, noble tomes innumerable, so

¹ 'The Usefulness of Real Philosophy to Religion', *Essays*. (1676.) 17.

² Ferguson, *Some Aspects of Bibliography*. 21.

curiously made with such infinite cost and labour, may stand amazed and never wonder enough at it; and thank God withal, that by the light of science and the spread of tolerance we are so happily freed from that slavish fanaticism in these our days, for heretofore, almost in all countries, superstition has blinded the hearts of men and led them to bibliophobia and from thence to acts of biblioclastic frightfulness. Philosophers, priests, monarchs, all were immersed in this mist, this more than Cimmerian darkness, when ignorance, error, barbarism, folly, madness, triumphed and insulted over the most wise and understanding book: *The monkes kepte them undre dust, ye ydle-headed prestes regarded them not, theyr latter owners have most shamefully abused them, and yet covetouse merchantes have sold them awaye into foren nacyons for moneye.*¹ Many manuscripts, guilty of no other superstition than red letters in the front, says Fuller, were condemned to the fire: and here a principall key of antiquitie was lost, to the great prejudice of posterity.² Even so recently as the seventeenth century Séguier told de Thou that whatever is composed in elegant and classical Latin, is suspected at Rome of impiety, and de Thou's own History was formally prohibited.³

But I seek not to defend only wise books and to inveigh against the murderers of art and knowledge. I uphold all books and condemn all bibliophobes, for they are all one, whatever they impugn, and so inlarded and interlaced their several superstitions, that there is scarce a sound part, or any difference amongst them. I say they are all bad, none better than the rest, for by their acts they risk bringing famine upon our minds,⁴ by

¹ Bayle, Bishop of Ossory. Pref. to Leland's *New Year's Gift to King Henry VIII.* ² *Holy Warre.* (1649.) 241. ³ *Life of Thuanus.* Collinson. 118-19.

⁴ Milton, *Areopagitica.* Ed. Holt White. 167.

hindering and retarding the importation of our richest merchandise,¹ though, as like as not, at odds among themselves, and no better than those barbarians, who so frequently convulsed the more civilized portions of Europe, and found a morbid pleasure in destroying those works which bore evidence to the mental superiority of their enemies.² Well may one of our historians³ say that this subject should be dilated in a separate volume, wherein *rude Omar, Jovian, and the despoilers of the monasteries, might be pilloried.* Seneca would be indicted for his insult to Cleopatra's books, and Sir Thomas Browne for saying he could with patience behold the urn and ashes of the Vatican, could he, with a few others, recover the perished leaves of Solomon;⁴ and even though he escaped by his saving clause, and some other excuse were found for Seneca, the rest might be treated, saith mine author, like those Genoese miscreants who were commemorated on marble tablets as the worst of mankind. If Sir Thomas Browne feared, as he did, that solid learning would be submerged, even in his day, by the multiplication of books, the fact that learning has survived the bookish multiplication of our times is proof that his remedy of reduction by fire is no remedy.

I pray there be no such sabotage in our time, though we are not free from superstition, priggishness, learned jealousies, pedantry, false pudicity and political fears, for as running water stopped in one place breaks out in another, so doth superstition. *We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of publick men, how we spill that season'd Life of Man preserv'd and stor'd up in Books; since we*

¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 141. ² Merryweather, *Bibliomania in the Middle Ages*. 4. ³ Elton, *Great Book-Collectors*. 7-8. ⁴ *Religio Medici*. i, Sec. 24.

*see a kinde of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdome; and if it extend to the whole impression, a kinde of massacre, wherof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemen-tall Life, but it strikes at that ethereall and fifth essence, the breath of Reason it selfe, slaiers an Immortality rather than a life;*¹ as Milton saith, *As good almost kill a man as kill a good book*; he who slays a book is a murderer, and worthy the full measure of that anathema pronounced by Ben Jonson (after the loss by fire of some manuscripts of his own):²

But to confine him to the Brew-houses,
The Glass-house, Dye-vats, and their Furnaces;
To live in Sea-coal, and go forth in Smoke;
Or lest that Vapour might the City choke,
Condemn him to the Brick-kills, or some Hill—
Foot (out in Sussex) to an Iron Mill;
Or in small Fagots have him blaze about
Vile Taverns, and the Drunkards piss him out;
Or in the Bell-Man's Lanthorn like a Spy,
Burn to a Snuff, and then stink out and die,

. . . .
Pox on your Flame-ship, Vulcan; if it be
To all as fatal as't hath been to me.

Failing such deserved punishment what shall we wish them, but *mentem sanam*, a sound mind, and the good physician Tolerance? But more of their differences, paradoxes, opinions, mad pranks, in another chapter.

IV. BOOKS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

We are taught in Holy Scripture that *the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour;*³ and as in

¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 17-18. ² 'An Execration upon Vulcan', *Works*. (1691.) 564. ³ 1 Peter v, 8.

several shapes, and by several engines and devices, he prowls about destroying what is good and fair, books have not escaped him. Sometimes he appears as an Angel of Light, seeking to save the world from *pernicious literature*, and is so cunning that he is well-nigh able to deceive the very elect, as Savonarola maddened the Florentines into such a pious frenzy that they burned the Medici books to the chiming of all the bells of Florence. At other times he is *fidei defensor*, regardless of the fact that faith varies with time and place: *When first our religion beganne to gaine authoritie with the Lawes, it's zeale armed many against all sorts of Pagane books, whereof the learned sort have a great losse. My opinion is, that this disorder hath done more hurt to learning, than all the Barbarian flames.*¹ Again he appears as censor of the press, and in this disguise acts as agent for monarch or statesman, and as a result books are issued or suppressed *cum privilegio*: *You cannot be a good contemplative man, and a good commonwealth's man. Therefore take heed of too much book.*² The whole civilized world is subject to these pests, all times have been misaffected by them, past and present. How many books in every land hath superstition and tyranny destroyed! What a deal of learning hath been scuttled by their tricks! How many Tyrants of Books, False Prophets, have lived in every King's Reign and in most Republics! What chronicle will not afford examples? So many *ignes fatui*, will-o'-the-wisps, have led men out of the way, terrified some, deluded and tortured others, that *nullus tradere stilus sufficiat*, no pen could describe it. But they are all the same, fanatical biblioclasts, and as such

¹ Montaigne, 'Of the Liberty of Conscience', *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. ii, 493.

² Newcastle to Charles II, qt. Guiney, *Patrins.* 271.

to be condemned; it is all one whether it is a Jehoiakim destroying the first copy of *Jeremiah*,¹ or a 'Jix'² chivvyng *Ulysses* and the *Well of Loneliness* out of England. But I proceed.

The forerunners or concomitants of bibliophobes were in all ancient lands, in China no less than Judah, in Rome no less than where *the Turk upholds his 'Alcoran'*, by the prohibition of printing,³ as I shall show. In ancient Rome the works of Labienus were the first to be burnt. Labienus, saith Montaigne,⁴ was a man of great worth and authority, and, amongst other commendable qualities, most excellent in all manner of learning, and belike also a son of the chief of all Cæsar's captains. He had many envied virtues, but courtiers, and such as in his time were favoured of the Emperors, hated his frankness, his fatherly humours, and the distaste he bore against tyranny, wherewith it may be supposed he had stuffed his booke and compositions. These adversaries of his pursued him before the Magistrate of Rome, and prevailed so far that many of his works were burned. He was the first on whom this new example of punishment was put in practice, which after continued long in Rome, and was executed on divers others, to punish learning, studies, and writings with death and consuming fire. This loss Labienus could not endure, nor brooke to survive those his deare, and highly esteemed issues; he therefore caused himself to be shut up alive in the tomb of his ancestors, where, being already buried, he killed himself. Nor is this all, for Montaigne

¹ Jeremiah xxxvi, 22–3. ²The nickname of Sir William Joynson-Hicks, now Viscount Brentford. He was Home Secretary when these books were banned, and defended himself in a pamphlet: *Do We Need a Censor?* (1929.) ³Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 141. ⁴Essays. Ed. Seccombe. ii, 100–102.

gives two more instances from ancient lore in the same kind; that of Cassius Severus, a most eloquent man, who, seeing his books burnt, demanded that he be burnt alive with them while he still bare and kept in mind what they contained; and that of Gerontius Cordus, whose books were condemned by the Senate to be consumed by fire, because they commended Brutus and Cassius. Cordus thereupon was pleased to accompany them in death, by hunger-strike, for he pined away by abstaining from all manner of meat.

Janin¹ illustrates the same terrorism in France with the familiar example of Richelet's *Dictionnaire des Rimes*. This *innocent book did not at first pass the censor*. After the manner of the tribe of heresy hunters, he found in it all manner of heresies. Richelet was not to be defeated, so he carried his manuscript into Switzerland, and it was printed at Geneva in the year 1680. Ten thousand copies were with some difficulty introduced into France and deposited at Villejuif on the way to Fontainebleau, and from there offered to the bookseller, Simon Bernard, *dont le nom doit être conservé sur la liste des délateurs*.² Bernard denounced the book to the *Syndic de la librairie*. The *Dictionary* was condemned, and Bernard, together with another *libraire*, and Bourdon, a bookbinder and clerk to the *Syndic*, went to Villejuif to seize Richelet's packages. The copies were taken to *la Chambre syndicale, ces malheureux librairies de Paris*, where they were destroyed by fire. Richelet died of grief; but the day afterwards *le délateur Bernard* was stabbed whilst walking in a crowd *par une main vengeresse*.

¹ *Le Livre*. 232-3. ² 'Whose name should be preserved in the list of informers.'

The second volume of so innocent and useful a work as Anthony Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* was condemned by the University to be burned in the Theatre Yard, because it accused the Chancellor, Edward Earl of Clarendon, of bribery and corruption, the author being expelled from Oxford as a *disturber of the Peace* and fined thirty-four pounds. Hearne afterwards discovered that Wood suffered for a reflection of which he was not the real author, for *he was furnished with it by Mr. Aubrey, who had it from Judge Jenkins himself.*¹ Even that glory of our literature, *Paradise Lost*, aroused suspicion. John Milton found difficulty in obtaining a licence to publish his poem because the licenser imagined that, *in the noble simile of the sun in an eclipse* there lurked some treason. A more successful attack was made upon Milton's two pamphlets *Johannis Miltoni Angli pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, and his answer to the *Eikon Basilica*, together with John Goodwin's *Obstructors of Justice*, all of which were condemned to be *publicly burnt by the hand of the common hangman*, by a *Proclamation of Charles II, 1660.*²

But these are toys compared with that stupendous execution of books which was ordained in the third century B.C. in the Ch'in State of China, by Li Ssu, Prime Minister and Senior Historiographer. In 213 B.C. Li Ssu set out to abolish the past and start history afresh. All existing literature, except works of *agriculture, medicine and divination*, was to be destroyed. Those who refused to give up their books for destruction were branded and condemned to slavery on the Great Wall for four years. The plan, says Giles,³ was carried out with considerable vigour. Many valuable works perished and

¹ Davis, *Olio.* 98-9. ² *Ib.* 66-70. ³ *Chinese Biog. Dict.* 464-5.

the *Confucian Canon* itself would have been irretrievably lost but for the devotion of certain scholars, who concealed the tablets and thus made possible the discovery and restoration of the text in the following century. Those who resisted these edicts by so much as a word were punished, and 460 of the *literati* were buried alive at Hsien-yang for treasonable language. The end of Li Ssu was in keeping with these terrors, for on the death of Lu Pu-wei, whom he had elevated as the First Emperor of the New Era, he joined in a conspiracy to enthrone Hu Hai; afterwards seeking to restrain the barbarities to which the new monarch was prone, he aroused the jealousy of the powerful eunuch Chao Kao, who accused him of treason, wrung a confession from him by torture, and had his body sawn asunder in the market place. Thus passed away a notorious biblioclast; whether his fate will arouse pity among bibliophiles they themselves must decide.

V. THE GOOD MAN AS BIBLIOPHOBE

Before continuing my tale of persecution and malignity, I must write a few words on those who cause such evils, lest you conclude of a sudden that the chief culprits are felons, criminals, or other wicked fellows. That this is not so I shall now set forth, and for a prefatory admonition recall how Petrarch's favourite books were attacked by his father,¹ as it may help me to develop my main argument, which is that these evils are not solely the work of bad men, but rather, and mainly, the work of good men, or perhaps I should say, men of good intentions, for, if the results be bad, it were illogical

¹ *Francesco Petrarca*. Tatham. i, 106.

to call the promoters of them good. *Hell*, Bernard Shaw warns us, *is paved with good intentions, not with bad ones*;¹ so in all tactics and manœuvres for the care and preservation of books we must be particularly aware of the enterprise of good men, for *few book-ghouls are*, says Lang, *worse than the moral ghoul*.² But to my task.

The tale begins, as some think, during the poet's early days at the University of Montpellier, or, as others say, at a still earlier period, when he kept *some works of Cicero and the poets in a safe hiding place*, as a secret delectation and relief from schoolbooks. Suspecting some such doings, his father invaded the seminary, seized the forbidden classics and proceeded to make a bonfire of them. At the sight of this Petrarch let out a howl of dismay as though he himself had been thrown into the flames. The vandal, beholding his son's distress, was moved to withdraw two blackened volumes from the fire: a *Virgil* and the *Rhetoric* of Cicero, which he restored to the boy, and so consoled him. The story of Petrarch's misfortune, I say, may be taken as a symbol of many attacks which have been made upon books by good men. But here I consider, and I wish they whom it concerns most would do so too, that this incendiary act, with its tardy repentance, is no less to be condemned than those more desperate and compendious means which greater vandals have adopted, as Jovian is said to have burned the library of the Emperor Julian in a parody of Alexander's Feast.

Ignorance and intolerance are of the same stock, whatever their party. Mahomedan or Christian, Jew or Gentile, Papist or Protestant, miscreants all when their acts are atrocious.

¹ 'Revolutionist's Handbook', *Man and Superman*. 239. ² *The Library*. 58.

During the Reformation in England they slew books indiscriminately, *ad libitum*; New Testaments and Bibles, even *the King's majesties books concerning our religion lately set forth*.¹ That mysterious iniquity provokt and troubl'd at the first entrance of Reformation, sought out new Limbos and new Hells wherein they might include our Books also within the number of their damned,² for the unsatisfied desire of self-righteousness drives them beyond all limits of justice or reason to hunger and thirst after more objects to destroy, until destruction becomes an end in itself. In Milton's own day there were those, against whom he levelled that noble protest, his *Areopagitica*, who would have done as much out of fear that the whiffle of every new pamphlet should stagger an *unprincipl'd, unedify'd, and Laick rabble, out of their catechism, and Christian walking*;³ and he tells how, before then, the Council of Trent, and the Spanish Inquisition engendering together brought forth or perfected those Catalogues and expurging Indexes that rake through the entralls of many an old good Author, with violations worse than any could be offer'd to his tomb. Nor did they stay in matters hereticall, but any subject that was not to their palat, they either condemn'd in a prohibition, or had it strait into the new Purgatory of an Index; and, he saith, to fill up the measure of encroachment, their last invention was to ordain that no Book, Pamphlet, or Paper should be printed (as if S. Peter had bequeath'd them the keys of the Presse also out of Paradise), unlesse it were approv'd and licenc't under the hands of 2 or 3 glutton Friers;⁴ until in the end they make a raid upon the Holy of Holies, and put the Bible itself into the first rank of prohibited Books, together

¹ Wood, *Hist. Oxon.* i, 81. ² Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 46.

³ *Ib.* 114. ⁴ *Ib.* 35-6.

with those *ancientest Fathers as Clement of Alexandria, and that Eusebian book of Evangelick preparation, transmitting our ears through a hoard of heathenish obscenities to receive the Gospel.*¹

The dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII opened the flood-gates of wrath against books. The havoc, Davis well says,² cannot be better described than in those words of Bayle, Bishop of Ossory, in his preface to Leland's *New Year's Gift to King Henry VIII*. *A greate nombre of them whyche purchased those superstycyouse mansyons reserved of those librarye booke, some to serve theyre jakes, some to scour their candlestyckes, and some to rubbe theyr bootes. Some they solde to grossers and sope sellers, and some they sent over see to ye book bynders, not in small nombre, but at tymes whole shypes full to ye wonderynge of foren nacyons.* He records a special instance of a *merchant manne* of his own knowing, who bought the contents of two noble libraries for forty shillings, which *he occupyed in ye stede of greypaper* for more than ten years, and then had as much left for ten years to come. Well may he say, *a prodygynous example is thys and to be abhorred of all men whyche love theyr nacyon as they shoulde do.* He does not exonerate the Universities from blame, and curses that *bellye whyche seketh to be fedde with such ungodlye gaynes.*

Cartloads of books were taken away from Merton, Balliol, and New Colleges, and destroyed. *These instances might be infinitely multiplied, so terrible were those intemperate outrages.*³ Sometimes they were destroyed by learned men, at other times an *ignorant and excited mob became the executioners of whole collections.*⁴ *The rioters in the Protector Somerset's time*

¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 68. ² Olio. 72-3. ³ Merryweather, *Bibliomania in the Middle Ages*. 8. ⁴ Ib. 6.

broke into the 'Aungerville Library', as de Bury's collection was called, and burnt all the books.¹ Thus perished Duke Humphrey's library at Oxford, even down to the shelves and stalls, for what need of retaining them, when no one thought of replacing their contents, and when the University could turn an honest penny by their sale? So the *venerabiles viri* made a timber-yard of the Duke's treasure-house.²

Such biblioclastic outbreaks are periodical. *Intolerance is of all periods.*³ Prior to the Reformation, in the time of Edward VI, the works of the schoolmen, *Lombard*, *Aquinas*, *Scotus*, etc., were cast out of the college libraries, and, *lest their impiety and foolishness in this act should be further wanting they brought it to pass that certain rude young men should carry this great spoil of books about the city on biers, which being so done, to set them down in the common market place, and then burn them.*⁴ This ceremony they called the *Funeral of Scotus and the Scotists*. At this time, he concludes, and at all times during this King's reign, *was seldom seen anything in the Universities, but books of poetry, grammar, idle things and frivolous stuff*. Then came a lull in these depredations, and Leland was appointed to *search and rummage over libraries to find and preserve any literary relic worthy of such honour*, but it was too late. *Less learned hands had rifled those parchment collections long ago, mutilated their finest volumes by cutting out with childish pleasure the illuminations with which they were adorned, tearing off the binding for the gold clasps which protected the treasures within, and chopping up huge folios as fuel for their blazing hearths, and immense collections were sold as waste paper.*⁵

¹ Elton, *Great Book-Collectors*. 58. ² Macray, *Annals*. 13. ³ Anatole France, *Garden of Epicurus*. Trans. Allinson. 96. ⁴ Wood, *Hist. Oxon.* i, 108.

⁵ Merryweather, *Bibliomania in the Middle Ages*. 5.

Doubtless among the books destroyed at that time were, says Fuller,¹ *many volumes full fraught with superstition*, but which, notwithstanding, might have been useful to learned men, *except any will deny apothecaries the privilege of keeping poison in their shops, when they can make antidotes of them.* But besides these, saith mine author, *what beautiful bibles! Rare Fathers! Subtle Schoolmen! Useful historians! Ancient! Middle! Modern! What painful comments were here amongst them! What monuments of mathematics all massacred together!* Thus the ignorant, as Merryweather² sets out, *delighted to destroy that which they did not understand, and the factional spirit of the more enlightened would not allow them to make one effort to save those valuable relics of early English literature which crowded the shelves of the monastic libraries.* They were sentenced to death if they bore the sign of the cross, red letters, illuminations representing saints, or even diagrams and circles of a mathematical kind. The books were condemned to be burnt and the authors sometimes made to follow them. How many books thus perished in England I know not, but we may take as a guide the suppression of the monasteries during the French Revolution, when, in the year 1790 alone, 4,194,000 volumes were destroyed, 25,000 being manuscripts.³

Even in times nearer to our own intolerance is not yet dead. We have still to combat the muddy thoughts of the philistine and the inflamed heart of the malicious. A modern instance of political intolerance was the attempted burning of the *North Briton*, by the public hangman in Cheapside, in the year 1763; and 'tis an instance this time of the profane herd being on the side of justice, which I record gladly, for the

¹ *Church Hist.* vi, 335. ² *Op. cit.* 7. ³ *Bibliomania in the Middle Ages.* 4, n.

common people are most times as a flock of sheep, a rude semi-literate rout, void many times, despite their commonalty, of common sense, a many-headed beast, *bellua multorum capitum*,¹ for they will go whithersoever they are led: as you lead a ram over a gap by the horns, all the rest will follow, *non quâ eundum, sed quâ itur*,² they will do as they see others do. *The mob rose*, says Horace Walpole,³ *the greatest mob, says Mr. Sheriff Blunt, that he has known in forty years. They were armed with that most bloody instrument, the mud out of the kennels; they hissed in the most murderous manner; broke Mr. Sheriff Harley's coach-glass in the most frangent manner; scratched his forehead, so that he is forced to wear a little patch in the most becoming manner; and obliged the hangman to burn the paper with a link, though faggots were prepared to execute it in a more solemn manner.* Even the link did not succeed, as the *North Briton* was rescued ere it had been alight a moment.

But this is a toy compared with what hath been done by fanatical bibliolytes; examples are endless. *Il n'y a pas de serpent, de bête fauve ou de monstre odieux qui ait été traqué, persécuté, maltraité autant que la plus simple et la plus innocente des brochures:* no serpent, wild beast, or brutish monster, so harmed, so ill-treated as that little book the *Lettres d'Héloïse et Abélard*: condemnation, abolition, expurgation, no indignity too great to be heaped upon it by *les puissances d'ici-bas*, the powers here below. *Ouvrez les prisons, allumez les bûchers; au feu le livre! au feu l'auteur! Ils ont brûlé les Lettres d'Héloïse et Abélard!* Jean-Jacques Rousseau *les a ressuscitées;* open the prisons, light the faggots, burn the letters! burn Rousseau for reviving

¹ Horace, *Epistles*. I, i, 76. ² Seneca, *De Vita Beata*. i, 3. ³ Letter to Hertford, 9:xii:1763.

them.¹ John Wesley quotes out of the *Life of Mrs. Bellamy* a story of David Garrick, who, when taking ship, was given a parcel by a lady and desired not to open it till he was at sea. When he did so, he found Charles Wesley's *Hymns*, and immediately threw them overboard. *I cannot believe it*, John Wesley writes, *I think Mr. Garrick had more sense. He knew my brother well; and he knew him to be not only far superior in learning, but in poetry, to Mr. Thomson, and all his theatrical writers put together: none of them can equal him, either in strong, nervous sense, or purity and elegance of language.*²

Many otherwise respectable readers have, during moments of irritation, an impulse to destroy a book. *One wonders what the devil he can mean, and longs to fling the book into the fire*, exclaims Cunningham Graham; but he checks this impious notion and in a few moments recants it.³ The morbid bibliolyte destroys books on principle: *Some books, like the City of London, fare better for being burnt.*⁴ Even so sane a man as Joseph Glanvill so disapproved of certain *Books of curious Arts*, that were voted to Destruction by Apostolick Authority and Zeal, that were they all laid together in a fired heap, and he says, one Drop from my Finger would quench the Flames, I would not let it fall.⁵ At a later date Mark Pattison tells⁶ how Conington's *Diary*, a daily journal to which he committed without restraint the whole current of his thoughts and feelings, and consequently a genuine psychological study of a remarkable mind which could hardly be overrated, was burnt by his executors because, in the discharge of their duty, they considered themselves called upon to destroy it,

¹ Jules Janin, *Le Livre*. 69. ² *Journal*. Ed. Parker. ii, 480-1. ³ Review of *Christopher Columbus* by Filson Young, *Saturday Review*. 10:xi:1906.

⁴ Anon., *Laconics*. (1701.) 119. ⁵ 'The Usefulness of Real Philosophy to Religion', *Essays*. (1676.) ⁶ *Memoirs*. 252.

as the manuscript of Byron's *Memoirs* was burnt on May 17, 1824, at 50 Albemarle Street, in the presence of Hobhouse, Colonel Doyle, Wilmot Horton, Luttrell, Moore, and John Murray.¹ Dowden so regretted the publication of the love-letters of Keats and Shelley that, like S. Francis, he wrote,² *I could praise God for my brother Fire, and think cremation and a few white ashes a noble close and consummation for what has been most living and most dear.* Spencer gives an instance of pettiness which is a wonder to read, for it tells how Sir Philip Burne-Jones burned the inscriptions in the presentation copies and the letters he had received from Oscar Wilde after the fall and imprisonment of that poet;³ and he gives out⁴ also that he offered Walter Greaves, the artist, 50 guineas for a bundle of letters from Whistler, but rather than sell them the old artist tore them up, in a fit of misplaced reverence for his great friend, and thrust them into the fire. And, quite recently, I find the Dean of St. Paul's bragging, in an evening newspaper,⁵ that he burnt the first two volumes of Havelock Ellis's *Psychology of Sex. I am not squeamish*, he boasts, *but they were too unsavoury.* These honourable essays in the natural history of our species were nothing to him but *pickled diseases.* Good men are indeed dangerous to our books.

¹ Lord Ernle, Intro. Byron's *Ravenna Journal.* 4. ² *Fragments from Old Letters.* 177. ³ *Forty Years in My Bookshop.* 20. ⁴ *Ib.* 264. ⁵ *Evening Standard.* 22:v:1929.

PART II

O GOD! O MONTREAL!¹

I. PODSNAPERY INTRODUCED

That it is sometimes, as Voltaire tells us,² *dangerous to make a book*, and that *evil books*, as Fielding proclaims, *corrupt both manners and taste*, many will support, but which books are good and which are bad is much disputed, since most have been subjected at one time or another to

The holy strife of disputatious men.³

Homer and Hesiod were banished from Plato's *Republic*, but Plato himself was perpetually reading *Sophron Mimus and Aristophanes, books of grossest infamy*;⁴ Ovid was banished from Rome for writing his *Ars Amatoria*; the *Divell*, Milton⁵ gives out of *Hieron, whipt St. Jerom in a lenten dream, for reading Cicero*; Tertullian sees in stage-plays the poisonous distillations of the Devil, who, out to make the *dose pleasant*, throws in a *Cordial Drop to make the Draught go down*; he even goes so far as to steal *some few Ingredients from the Dispensatory of Heaven*. We must beware of these charms of philosophy and diction: *Look upon it only as Honey dropping from the Bowels of*

¹ These words are the repetend of Samuel Butler's satiric poem, 'A Psalm of Montreal', which was written after a visit to the Montreal Museum, where he discovered that the plaster casts of the Antinous and the Discobolus had been banished from public view because they were 'rather vulgar'. See *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*. 388-9. ² *Phil. Dict.* 'Books.' ii. ³ Crabbe, *The Library*. ⁴ *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 78. ⁵ *Ib.* 52.

a *Toad, or the Bag of a Spider.*¹ Baxter inveighs against *vain romances, play-books, and false stories*, and Judge Jeffreys contended as stiffly against Baxter's own books: *Richard, Richard*, he exclaimed at Baxter's trial, *dost thou think we will let thee poison the court? Richard, thou art an old knave. Thou hast written books enough to load a cart, and every book as full of sedition as an egg is full of meat*; the *Sofa* of Crébillon, whose improprieties incurred the disapproval of many good people in England during the nineteenth century, is still regarded as a 'questionable' book; but in the days of George II it was enjoyed by many reputable folk. Horace Walpole thought it *admirable*, and Lord Chesterfield was so entranced by the work when it first appeared that he imported three hundred copies from Paris and *gave them to be sold at White's.*² Andrew Lang had a copy of Pine's *Horace*, illustrated with engravings from gems, which had passed through the ruthless hands of a moral ghoul. Not only has he obliterated the verses which hurt his delicate sense, he says, but he has actually scraped away portions of the classical figures, and the 'breasts of the nymphs in the brake'. Well may he conclude that the soul of Tartuffe had entered into that sinner.³ These differences are augmented by Ernst and Seagle, who single out the case of the *much-expurgated and suppressed Boccaccio* who appears upon the *Index Expurgatorius*, but all the obscenity which secretaries of vice societies insist shall be removed, before Boccaccio may enter the home, is in the papal Boccaccio;⁴ and later in the Victorian era there often were sensitive souls who found even Bowdler's *Shakespeare* a little too frank for their taste.⁵ All of this shows

¹ Qt. Collier, *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* (1699.) 258.

² Horace Walpole, *Letters*. Ed. Cunningham. i, 129. ³ *The Library.* 58-9.

⁴ *To the Pure . . .* 154. ⁵ *Ib.* 122.

how difficult it is to steer safely through these vexed waters, and, as Dr. Schiller observes, remembering how he was snubbed by a professor of ancient history for suggesting that *a research into the eugenical aspects of ancient life* might be good for a Prize Essay, *how dangerous it is to give impressionable youths great literature to read; they may not treat it merely as stuff to be got up for examination, and may even get new ideas from it!*¹

Caliph Omar, the incendiary of the Library of Alexandria, believed, according to Gibbon, that all books containing matter not in the *Koran* were dangerous, and all those which contained what was in the *Koran*, useless. In the year 1509, at Frankfurt, the monk Pfäfferkorn, a convert from Judaism, was so enraptured with his new-found faith that he obtained an imperial decree that all Hebrew books save the *Scriptures* should be destroyed; this so alarmed Reuchlin for the fate of his beloved *Cabala* that he held that only those books proved to have a taint of magic or blasphemy should be burned, and for this heresy he was cited before the Grand Inquisitor at Cologne.² That ferocious satirist, Ulric von Hutten, so enraged the citizens of Mainz that they threatened to destroy his library, but von Hutten was equal to the emergency: *If you burn my books, he challenged, I will burn your town;*³ and, in such a contingency, the citizens of Mainz would have deserved their fate.

So difficult is it to forecast what will be considered a good book in the future that our librarians have made many blunders when attempting to winnow the grain from the chaff of

¹ *Eugenics and Politics*. Pref. vii. ² *The Great Book-Collectors*. Elton. 88.

³ *Ib.* 80

literary harvests for the purpose of economizing space. Thus, Madan points out, a great library, in 1815–16, rejected the *Army List*, Cobbett's *Weekly Register*, *Memoirs of Oliver Cromwell*, Byron's *Siege of Corinth*, Shelley's *Alastor*, Scott's *Antiquary*, and Wordsworth's *Thanksgiving Ode*. Well may he doubt the power of contemporaries to determine the residual value of a book. He gives as a further example the sixty or seventy thousand Victorian novels in the British Museum and the Bodleian which many would rightly consider to be composed of trash. Yet Madan has no doubt that a week never passed during the compilation of the *Oxford English Dictionary* without recourse to that collection.¹

Those who applaud what is good are as like to be wrong (I could quote many examples) as those who condemn what is bad; for time is ever undermining our calculations and opinions: *the terms which are delicate in one age become gross in the next, and whether a thing shall be designated by a plain noun substantive or by a circumlocution is mere matter of fashion;*² and the good books of one time are apt to become the bad books of another. In 1835 '*Mademoiselle de Maupin*' shocked the immoral French and aroused the greatest indignation. In 1922 it was calmly accepted in America;³ Robert Buchanan denounced Dante Gabriel Rossetti as obscene and immoral, some of his sonnets being *one profuse sweat of animalism*; Carew, Cowley, Drummond, the Fletchers and other poets admired to-day, are but the products of a scrofulous and foul-mouthed Italian disease which raged and devastated art, literature, and society in those days, and the Rev. Dr. Donne's poetic method is just as

¹ *Ideal Bodleian.* 21. ² Macaulay, 'Leigh Hunt', *Essays*. (1872.) 572.

³ Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* 71.

bad, sometimes going so far as to resemble the horrible manner of Mr. Swinburne's '*Anactoria*', one of the poems of a school of poets who it is difficult to believe have not drunk deep at the muddy *Aganippe* of their predecessors here in England, as well as at the poetic fountain polluted by the influx of the Parisian sewers, whose most tremendous development is Charles Baudelaire, *dandy of the brothel, Brummel of the stews*; yet Buchanan himself would beguile many an hour, when snug at anchor in some lovely *Highland Loch*, with the inimitable, yet questionable pictures of Parisian life left by Paul de Kock.¹ '*Hamlet*' shocked all Cromwellian Puritans, and shocks nobody to-day, says D. H. Lawrence, and some of Aristophanes shocks everybody to-day, and didn't galvanize the later Greeks at all; he thinks Boccaccio at his hottest less pornographic than *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, or *Jane Eyre*;² and his own books, often denounced for a frankness which some consider obscene, are so ethical in purpose that if his attitude to sex were adopted, the love lyric and the smoking-room story would disappear; but there would be some discrimination in love lyrics, and I find that although '*Who is Sylvia?*' may just as well disappear, all that pure and noble and heaven-blessed stuff being only the counterpart of the smoking-room story, and though '*Du bist wie eine Blume*', which is really as pornographic as a dirty story, may go the way of *Sylvia*, he would preserve such a sound love-lyric as '*O, my luve's like a red, red rose*', preferring as he does the *red, red rose* to the *pure, pure lily* because nowadays the *pure, pure lilies* are mostly festering.³ Even the exceptions which in the perspective of time seem like solid rocks: Aristotle and Plato, Dante and Shakespeare,

¹ *The Fleshly School of Poetry.* (1872.) *passim.* ² *Pornography and Obscenity.*

II. ³ *Ib.* 21-2.

Molière and *Milton*, have suffered from the fluctuations of opinion; sometimes they are outmoded, at other times immoral.

To name all masterpieces that have been persecuted would make a tedious catalogue: no end to it, for it would reach over all times and all lands, and include most of our choice writers from Plato to Havelock Ellis, from Aristophanes to Bernard Shaw, from Lucian to Thomas Hardy, from Catullus and Ovid and Juvenal to Shakespeare and Shelley and Swinburne. Hegel, says O'Connor in his defence of Walt Whitman,¹ is *denounced as an obscene bird of the night*; Kant *mud-balled with epithets*; Swedenborg *assailed as the apostle of lechery*; Voltaire *coffined in slander*; Humboldt *labelled 'infidel'*; Fourier *advertised into abomination as the high priest of anarchy and brotheltry*. These are triumphs, he says, almost worthy of the bolder hour when, livid with hatred, that spirit of the pit tore handfull of pages from hundreds of copies of Montaigne, shrieked through the Puritan at Shakespeare or through the Papist at Rabelais, and gave Campanella to the rack and Bruno to the fire. He sees in these persecutions a dark Janus at work, one side bigot, t'other prude. By this monster Comte and Renan are driven from their professorial chairs, and Whitman from his job; the same dark influence *assaults* with printed yells Colenso, Parker, Maurice, Strauss, Buckle, Powell, Darwin, Lyell, Huxley, Lecky, and Mill; it maligns Goethe, defames Emerson, derides Wendell Phillips as a *crazed fanatic*, treats George Eliot with social dishonour, and draws infamy like a curtain across the fame of George Sand. Well may Bernard Shaw announce that

¹ William Douglas O'Connor, 'The Good Gray Poet: Supplemental', *In re Walt Whitman*. 150-1.

Censorship ends in logical completeness when nobody is allowed to read any books except the books nobody can read.

Gregory the Great gloried in his ignorance of Greek, scorned the rules of Latin, and reproved a Bishop for teaching it, and Isidore of Seville would allow his monks to read no heathen writer except the grammarians; the chief Latin authors were looked at askance as sources of moral corruption, and any delight in their æsthetic beauty was regarded as a sin.¹ To extremely devout persons, says Gosse, there is something objectionable in most of the great writers of antiquity. In all those great ones, Horace, Lucretius, Terence, Catullus, Juvenal, there is something repulsive to those who are determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified, in all, he says, but Virgil, the most evangelical of the classics, the one who can be enjoyed with least to explain away and least to excuse.² But it is all one: They say! what say they? let them say! I shall make no effort to wipe off the froth of falsehood from the foaming lips of inebriated virtue, when fresh from the sexless orgies of morality and reeling from the delirious riot of religion,³ for time is the final adjudicator, and criticism, in the last resort, personal opinion, being as variable as a weathercock, fickle, capricious, unstable, first condemning the new and then the old, or first the old and then the new, now upholding what is popular, then what is exclusive: *Populare nunc nihil tam est quam odium popularium.*⁴ But if the objectors deny to themselves the delights of books and not to us, no great harm is done. Interference is our danger and the vice of the more vicious parts of virtue.⁵

¹ Tatham, *Petrarca*. ii, 9. ² *Father and Son.* (1909.) 167–8. ³ Swinburne, *Under the Microscope.* (1872.) 27. ⁴ Cicero, *Epist. ad Atticum*. ii, 20. ‘Nothing so popular now as hated of the popular party.’ ⁵ Swinburne, *op. cit.* 27.

Books which the world calls new reflect the past, and *books that the world calls immoral show the world its own shame.*¹ But since a negative philosophy is more dangerous than a positive, because more acceptable to the scatter-brained and shallow-pated, I say we must frustrate their condemnation even when they are like to be wise, which seldom happens. The ruder sort are so carried headlong by blind zeal, that they gull and torture themselves into a superstitious terror of anything that is new or strange; the more moral an author's intention the more vehemently is he condemned: the *Kreutzer Sonata* is no better than *foreign trash* expressing a *free-and-easy pruriency* appealing to *the love of moral filth.*² Some, for private gain, will butcher a masterpiece to make a journalistic holiday. With smug pretences, big words, plausible wit and noisy headline, they debase the currency of rhetoric in a rabble of idle contention, more noxious and more salacious than that which they condemn, so that in the end they do no more than arouse the appetites of the smut-hound, which sometimes, doubtless, is their aim,

In verse half veil'd raise titillating lust,
Like girls that deck with flowers Priapus' bust,³

and if not it might as well have been so, for history proves there is no better advertisement for a book than to condemn it for obscenity. *Forbidden fruits have unique flavours, and the bounds of suppression create new limits of desire*, so that these very vigilant societies which attempt to hold our morals in leash suppress the names of newly forbidden books from their reports lest perchance their own members be corrupted.⁴

¹ Oscar Wilde, *Intentions*. ² *Silver Domino*. (1892.) 240. ³ Mathias, *Pursuits of Literature*. Thirteenth Ed. (1809.) 67. ⁴ Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* 28.

Montaigne noted that *books being once called-in and forbidden become more saleable and publick.*¹ Martial found no way fitter to draw the Roman matrons to read his Books, which he thinks most moral and cleanly, than to counsel them by the first Epigram to skip the Book, because it was obscene;² and even among attorneys and other administrators of the law, we are told by astute observers that *court decisions of shocking sexual frankness are so much in demand that volumes containing them in the legal libraries are rebound many times as often as case-books containing decisions on less erotic subjects;*³ and that cunning publishers use the prohibitory indexes of the Papacy as guides for their growing market.⁴ Small wonder that there is not a bawdy novelist who would not rather be denounced by Dean Inge than praised by Desmond MacCarthy.

Every reader can summon instances of such condemnations from his own experience, so I shall do no more than point at a few examples from recent annals of abuse, those of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, among plays, and *The Rainbow* by D. H. Lawrence and the *Ulysses* of James Joyce among novels. New works which presume to decorticate love are always condemned by judges furnished with the same tricks of vituperation and the same verbal missiles drawn from the same parrot-stock. Clement Scott is a prime instance. He was the dramatic critic who held the fort of convention against the attacks of those revolutionaries of the eighteen-nineties who advanced under the banner of Ibsen,⁵ and he operated his mitrailleuse from a redoubt in the

¹ *Essays*. Seccombe. iii, 81. ² Donne, *Poetry and Prose*. Nonesuch Ed. 449.

³ Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* 24. ⁴ *Ib.* 97. ⁵ *The Eighteen-Nineties*. Holbrook Jackson. 205-215.

Daily Telegraph. The revolutionaries attacked with the censored play *Ghosts*, and Scott replied with a shock force of execration. *Ghosts* was *an open drain, a loathsome sore unbanded, a dirty act done publicly, a lazarus house with all its doors and windows open*; the play was *bestial, cynical, disgusting, poisonous, sickly, delirious, indecent, loathsome, fetid, literary carrion, crapulous stuff*; and Ibsen, a morbid man of *clinical confessions, gross and putrid indecorum*.¹ About twenty-five years later the Censor of Plays removed his embargo from this work, which has now passed into the Nirvana of classical and incurious acceptance.

How many good books have suffered these indignities I shall leave to the historians of folly and meddlesomeness; but none the less, I believe that this petty tyranny should be regarded sternly, and stoutly opposed whenever it reveals itself, for there is no telling to what lengths it will go, not only with new books but even with famous and honoured classics, as on that occasion when Mark Rutherford was stopped from reading the *Vicar of Wakefield* to Mrs. Snale's Dorcas Meeting by Mr. Snale: '*Because you know, Mr. Rutherford,*' he said, with his *smirk*, '*the company is mixed; there are young ladies present, and perhaps, Mr. Rutherford, a book with a more requisite tone might be more suitable on such an occasion.*'² We may have nothing but contempt for such counterfeit and maggot-eaten Christians, *a prude in literature is as tiresome as a prude in life*.³ And if we are weary of the spectacle of *Harlequin Virtue* making *love to the goddess Grundy*, and yawn at the sight of *the raddled old columbine Cant* performing *her usual old*.

¹ Qt. *Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Bernard Shaw. 3-4. ² *Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*. Coll. Ed. 31. ³ Garrod, 'How to know a Good Book from a Bad', *Profession of Poetry*. 263.

*pirouettes in the ballet of Morality,*¹ yet it is a wonder to see how good and godly men and honest lovers of books are taken in by these endeavours, so that all sane men long to drive away those foggy mists of superstition with the fresh winds of good humour and civil tolerance.

In the meantime it is useless for them to spend themselves in such vain, mercenary, and ridiculous attacks:

Raise not your scythe, Suppressors of our vice!
Reforming saints! too delicately nice!
By whose decrees, our sinful souls to save,
No Sunday tankards foam, no barbers shave;²

they fool their fellow fools and dunce their brother dunces to no purpose. They have made themselves ludicrous as well as set themselves an impossible task, and rather than trust our books to their crude expurgations it would be less harmful to leave *the foster child of licence, which fools used to call liberty*,³ to do its worst in the hope that familiarity may earn even the contempt of fools, for, in the long run, their bark is worse than their bite, and, like the mendacious critic castigated by Swinburne, they are like newts or blindworms rather than toads, with the appearance rather than the venom of serpents: their teeth as false as their tongues; their very venom a lie. But, he concludes, *when once we have seen the fang, though innocuous, protrude from a mouth which would fain distil poison and can only distil froth, we need no revelation to assure us that the doom of the creature is to go upon its belly and eat dust all the days of its life.*⁴ He that would gather a bundle or huddle of the fooleries of man in this respect of duty, morality, etc., might recount

¹ Swinburne, *Under the Microscope*. (1872.) 6. ² Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. 614-17. ³ Tacitus, *Dial. de. Or.* 40. ⁴ *Under the Microscope*. (1872.) 88.

wonders, but I shall not wander further, *ubi passim palantes error recto de tramite pellit*,¹ where error drives them in endless deviations from the right path; and I refrain without scruple, for it is all in Milton. If, he says,² we think to regulat Printing, thereby to rectify manners, we must regulat all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightful to Man. No musick must be heard, no song be sung, but what is grave and Dorick.³ Dancing must be licensed, that no gesture, motion, or deportment be taught our youth but what by their allowance shall be thought honest; so, too, all lutes, violins and guitars, in every house, must be examined, they must not be suffer'd to prattle as they doe, but must be licenc'd what they may say. And who shall silence all the airs and madrigals that whisper softness in chambers? The windows and balconies must be thought on, and shrewd books with dangerous frontispieces; visitors must inquire of the villagers what Lectures the bagpipe and the rebbeck reads ev'n to the ballatry and the gammuth of every municipal fiddler, for these are the Countryman's Arcadias and his Monte Mayors. Next household gluttony: who shall be the rectors of our daily rioting? What shall be done to inhibit the multitudes that frequent houses where drunk'nes is sold and harbour'd? Our garments should be inspected to see them cut into a lesse wanton garb. Who shall regulat the mixt conversation of our youth, male and female together? Who shall still appoint what shall be discours'd, what presum'd and no furder? Lastly, who shall forbid and separat all idle resort, all evill company? These things will be, and must be, he concludes, 'tis the business of a wise state not to inhibit but to discover how they should be less

¹ Horace, Sat. iii, 5. ² *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 81–6. ³ 'Music is almost as dangerous as Gunpowder; And it may be requires looking after no less than the Press, or the Mint.' Jeremy Collier, *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* (1699.) 279.

hurtful, less enticing: *To sequester out of the world into Atlantick and Eutopian Politics, which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition; but to ordain wisely as in this world of Evill, in the midd'st whereof God hath plac't us unavoidably. We boast of our light, he says again,¹ but if we look not wisely on the Sun itself, it smites us into darkness;* so any condemnation of the salacious or the indiscreet is an advertisement for fools and popinjays: *punitis ingeniis gliscit auctoritas,*² the punishing of wits enhances their reputation.

II. OF POISONOUS BOOKS

Certain books have been labelled poisonous,

And what the charm that can such health distil
From withered leaves—oft poisons in their bloom?³

*Ce sont de jolis flacons qui contiennent les réconfortants ou les toxiques de notre esprit lassé et assombri,*⁴ they are charming flasks of comfort or poison for our sick or sad souls. Some others, not a few, persuade themselves that every book which treats excessively of passionate love is *voluptarium venenum*, a delicious poison: *the tendency is for an excessive pornography to be envisaged as a dangerous drug which interferes with the life of democratic citizenship.*⁵ The politics or ethics with which they disagree, as the scholar in *Nicholas Breton*⁶ who called

¹ *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 145. ² Tacitus, *Annal.* I, iv, 35. ³ Bulwer-Lytton, 'The Souls of Books'. ⁴ Octave Uzanne, *Zigzags d'un Curieux*. 205.

⁵ Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* 171. ⁶ 'The Angle's Conference with the Scholler', *Works*. Kentish-Wright. i, 78. This is the popular opinion; it was held, curiously enough, by Frederick the Great, who wrote an essay against *The Prince*: 'an antidote step by step to the Italian's poison'. *Frederick the Great*. Margaret Goldsmith. iii.

Macchiavelli mortall rather than morrall, his works being *so full of poyson*. William Blake was so pained by reading *The Excursion* of Wordsworth that it brought on a fit of illness;¹ the pages of Taine's *History of English literature*, said Amiel, seem to choke one like the gases from a manufactory of mineral products;² Edward Dowden found such a corroding mineral acid in *Balzac* that one would need to have a heart tempered seven times in faith, hope and charity,³ to resist it; and Robert Buchanan announces that Gautier's memoir of Charles Baudelaire contains hardly a syllable with which one disagrees, and yet it skillfully and secretly poisons the mind of any unsuspicious reader;⁴ to Arthur Symons the newspaper is the plague, or black-death, of the modern world; an open sewer, running down each side of the street, and displaying the foulness of every day, day by day, morning and evening;⁵ an anonymous reviewer complains that the various editions of L. T. Meade's stories for girls are simply poison, done up to suit all pockets;⁶ whereas Schopenhauer roundly warns against all bad books, for, as intellectual poison, they destroy the mind;⁷ but James Douglas leaves them all behind when he stoutly asserts that he would rather give a healthy girl or a healthy boy a phial of prussic acid than a dose of that apparently more deadly poison *The Well of Loneliness*, for poison kills the body, but moral poison kills the soul.⁸

As my tale unfolds it will be found that there are as many differences of opinion here as in other problems relating to books, and although a safe trail is not easily blazed through

¹ Crabb Robinson, *Diary*. Thirty-fifth Ed. ii, 9. ² *Journal*. Trans. Ward. 181.

³ *Fragments from Old Letters*. 111. ⁴ *The Fleshly School of Poetry*. (1872.) 16.

⁵ *Studies in Prose and Verse*. 3. ⁶ 'The Queen of Girls' Book-Makers', *Saturday Review*. 15:xii:1906. ⁷ 'Of Books and Reading', *Religion and Other Essays*. Trans. Saunders. 65. ⁸ *Sunday Express*. 19:viii:1928.

this jungle, I hold it necessary, as a measure of precaution against narrow and malicious cavillers, to assume that no books are in themselves poisonous, but that any of them may become so by misuse: *used intemperately to excess*, as Kipling argues, *they become most dangerous drugs.*¹ Yet if, perchance, some of them be wholly poisonous, they may still be beneficial except in overdoses, and, even then, only a moron afflicted with iophobia would succumb to their evil advances. This, I doubt not, was in Milton's mind when he condemned *all the heathen writers of greatest infection, with whom is bound up the life of human learning*, for although they wrote *in an unknown tongue*, there was danger *so long as those languages are known as well to the worst of men, who are both most able and most diligent to instill the poison they suck, first into the Courts of Princes, acquainting them with the choicest delights and criticisms of sin.* As perhaps did that Petronius whom Nero called his *Arbiter, the Master of his Revels; and that notorious ribald of Arezzo,*² *dreaded, and yet dear to the Italian Courtiers.*³

It is common knowledge how some inveigh against those exotic books of the romantic period both in France and England, as Baudelaire, Gérard de Nerval, Villiers de L'Isle Adam, and, later, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Rossetti, Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, Beardsley, Arthur Symons. These writers are, according to some, the products of a *vaporous and miasmic darkness, a fever-cloud generated first in Italy and then blown westward*, which began in the days of Dante of the *Vita Nuova* and spread *as far north as Haworthen and Edinburgh, generating madness, obscuring Chaucer for centuries, darkening*

¹ *A Book of Words.* 93. ² Pietro Aretino. ³ Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 68-9.

the vast spaces of the Elizabethan drama, and breeding in the bones and marrow of English literature an ague of absurdity likely to keep human creatures crazy. Surrey, Wyatt, Spenser, Drayton, Shakespeare, Donne, Carew, Drummond, Crashaw, the Fletchers, etc., were early sufferers from this poisonous epidemic, which seemed to culminate with Cowley. *Milton corrected his system with strong tonics of the ancients, and Dryden fortified himself with the disinfectant of Roman satire;* and although the epidemic was held down by the formal cleanliness of the Addisonian period, and checked by the classicism of the age of Pope, it flared up again in the *Della Cruscan School*, continued in the *Spasmodic School* of Bailey, Smith and Dobell, to reach its climax in the *Scrofulous School* of the French Symbolists, and the *Fleshly School* of the English Pre-Raphaelites, who produced a poetry like absinthe, comparatively harmless, perhaps, if sipped in small quantities well diluted, but fatal if taken (as by Mr. Swinburne) in all its native strength and abomination; and the fatal marks of literary consumption are on every pale and delicate visage of the fantastic figures of this school.¹

It is argued that the decadents are a great literary neurosis with the power to anaesthetise their devotees in the heated, enervating atmosphere, heavy with unwholesome vapours, of a symbolism of the opium-pipe.² George Moore hails *Les Fleurs du Mal* as beautiful flowers, beautiful in sublime decay. What a record is yours, he apostrophises, and were Hell a reality how many souls would we find wreathed with your poisonous blossoms.³

¹ George Buchanan, *Fleshly School of Poetry. Passim.* ² Cities of the Plain. Proust. Trans. Scott Moncrieff. ii, 141. ³ Confessions of a Young Man. (1904.) 71.

Oscar Wilde himself calls Huysmans' *A Rebours* a *poisonous book*.¹ *The heavy odour of incense seems to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of Dorian Gray a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows.*

These admonitions are the more carefully to be regarded because just as contact with books relieves pain, stress, vapours, glooms, etc.,² so may they affect adversely by contagion; yet there are many readers of the opposite part who seem to be immune from the effects of all literary poisons, and they are fortunate. Henry Bradshaw was of their kind, for although he pronounced against Furnivall for the *poisonous way* in which he edited and prefaced his books, he still subscribed for them.³ No danger here, but even if there had been, the principle of *like curing like* would have saved him. If a book is septic in large doses it is aseptic in small, and, in the reverse case, large doses are prophylactics by revulsion. If a man is bitten by heresy, bawdry, vulgarity, blasphemy, or the like, dose him with them: *a hair off the tail of the dog that bit him*, as the saying is, hath great virtue, which was well known to Mithridates, King of Pontus,⁴ who had in his realm a breed of ducks which commonly lived on poison, and he found that a medicament composed of their blood expelled poison from the human body; he dosed himself with this potion so successfully, that, despite the desire of his enemies

¹ *Dorian Gray*. x. ² See 'Books Pharmaceutically Disposed', *Anatomy of Bibliomania*. i, 361-84. ³ *Memoir of Henry Bradshaw*. Prothero. 217.

⁴ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*. xvii, 16.

to poison him, he lived to die by falling upon his own sword:

They put arsenic in his meat
 And stared aghast to watch him eat;
 They poured strychnine in his cup
 And shook to see him drink it up:
 They shook, they stared as white's their shirt:
 Them it was their poison hurt.¹

For the rest, the weaklings who are unable to immunise themselves from such dangers, there is neither hope nor remedy. Books are like food, every article of which has its poison: *the peach with its prussic acid, the pie-plant with its oxalic acid, tea with its tannic acid, the tomato and even the potato, each with its own deleterious ingredient*,² point at dangers which we must conquer or starve; and just as we conquer these poisons by a judicious internal selection, an instinctive cunning, so we must learn to digest what is good for us in books and eject what is bad: remembering always that no garden is so well tilled, but some noxious weeds grow up in it; no wheat, but it hath some tares; and *there be some men*, so Ben Jonson argues, *born only to suck poison out of books: Habent venenum pro victu; imo pro deliciis.*³ Not all men can read all books with impunity, even the strongest minds having their limits of resistance. *One bad ode may be suffered*, said Dr. Johnson, *but a number of them together makes one sick.*⁴ Coventry Patmore was nearly lost by reading *Blanco White*, and wonders he *did not commit suicide during the three months of despairing atheism induced by it.*⁵ Yet, although one man's book is

¹ A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad.* lxii. ² Qt. Richardson, *Choice of Books*, from *Lit. World*. Boston, U.S.A. ³ Ben Jonson, *Discoveries*. (Temple Classics.) 53. 6. 'They regard poison as their food, even as a dainty.' ⁴ *Life*. Boswell. Ed. Hill. ii, 164. ⁵ *Memoirs*. Champneys. ii, 160.

another's poison, the power of books in *generating virtue* is probably, as William Godwin speculated, much greater than in generating vice; an argument which is supported by other observers as well as by common sense, for if there be any virtue in virtue, any power to defend itself, which, in spite of the doubts of faint-hearted moralists, I believe there is, then I say that the last word will be with the good book against the bad, and the permanence of its effect will be the test of its goodness, however poisonous it may be called by those with an axe to grind. Virtue redeems itself by reason of its virility, as men save themselves by an instinct for self-preservation which in itself is a moral force and, as such, vital. *Dost thou remember those men of former ages, who to keep their virtue in breath and exercise, did with such greediness seeke after evils?*¹ The world, says Macaulay, wants a healthful virtue, not a valetudinarian virtue, a virtue which can expose itself to the risks inseparable from all spirited exertion, not a virtue which keeps out of the common air for fear of infection, for a man who, exposed to the influences of such a state of society as that in which we live, and is yet afraid of exposing himself to the influence of a few Greek or Latin verses, acts, he thinks, much like the felon who begged the sheriffs to let him have an umbrella held over his head from the door of Newgate to the gallows, because it was a drizzling morning, and he was apt to take cold.² Like alone acts upon like, says Amiel, therefore do not amend by reasoning, but by example; approach feeling by feeling; do not hope to excite love except by love;³ nor should we forget that, as Montaigne well says, *evils have their life, their limits, their diseases and their health;* they are, in fine,

¹ Montaigne, 'Of Experience', *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. iii. ² 'Leigh Hunt', *Essays*. (1872.) 571. ³ *Journal*. Trans. Ward. 11.

diseases which, as like as not, cure themselves or, as we say, die out if not intimidated. *He that shall imperiously goe about, or by compulsion to abridge them, doth lengthen and multiply them;*¹ none the less, I must continue these reflections with a few passages concerning such poisonous effects as have been observed, and some of the opinions passed upon them.

III. FEAR OF POETS AND ROMANCERS

Others have said as much of romances which were supposed in former times to seduce and delude, as many still believe: they *soften the mind by love, which are the greatest subjects of these sorts of books, hours spent over them are fooled away and must be repented of.*² And you that are the cause of their folly, silly trumpery, pernicious pastimes of empty minds, romances, verses, songs, sonnets, and sonnettas, the devil take you all!³ Roger Ascham condemns the '*Morte Arthur*', the whole pleasure of which book standeth in two special points, in open man-slaughter and bawdry.⁴ Hannah More⁵ upbraids those trumpery novels wherein the people talk such gibberish as no folk in their sober senses ever did talk, where they are beggars to-day and lords to-morrow; waiting-maids in the morning, and duchesses at night; where every man seems to have the *Bank of England* in his escritoire, and all are good save one, who is made worse than Satan, no one middling or good in one way, bad in another; *I had rather read*, she exclaims, '*Tom Hickathrift*' or '*Jack the Giant Killer*', a thousand times. Such gimcracks

¹ 'Of Experience', *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. iii, 437-8. ² *The Athenian Mercury*. (1691-7.) ³ *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. Molière. Trans. Page. ⁴ *The Schoolmaster*. ⁵ *Two Wealthy Farmers*.

outnumber the good romances and novels, and would ultimately overlay them were there not readers enough to demand and get better stuff, and writers to meet their needs. Many go so far as to condemn all novels because some are bad and beloved of fools: *they are powerful baits of the devil, to keep more necessary things out of their minds, and better books out of their hands, and to poison the mind so much more dangerously, as they are read with more delight and pleasure.*¹ Romances make on Eugénie de Guérin the impression of gunpowder: *they burn, blacken, rend the heart.*² The habit of novel reading, novel upon novel for reading's sake, is the principal cause of the general vice of reading; novel-drinking is not so expensive, so outwardly repulsive, as dram-drinking, nor can it be said that it brings the same ruin and disgrace upon families—but the individual is as surely enfeebled by it, taste corrupted, will unstrung, understanding saddened.³

The burning of Don Quixote's books⁴ is a parable of intolerance born of fear, and although it was an act of true bibliophobia, and therefore reprehensible, it is a fair candidate for particular dispensation, since it was committed by simple and honest folk in order to preserve the health and life of a fine gentleman. It will be remembered that the Don's housekeeper, having made up her mind that those *accursed books of chivalry* had unhinged her master's reason, brought the matter to the notice of the curate, and procuring the key of the room where the *authors of all the mischief* were, they went in—the curate, Don Quixote's niece, Master Nicholas (the barber) and the housekeeper—and found more than one

¹ Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory*. i. 16. ² Letters. 141. ³ Anon., 'The Vice of Reading', *Temple Bar*. (1874.) xlvi. ⁴ Cervantes, *Don Quixote*. Trans. Ormsby. v-vi.

hundred volumes of big books very well bound, and some other small ones. The moment the housekeeper saw them she turned about and fled, returning immediately with a saucer of holy water and a sprinkler. *Here, your worship,* she said, *sprinkle the room, lest any magician among these books bewitch us in revenge for our design to banish them from the world.* The housekeeper and the niece were for an instant conflagration. But the curate directed the barber to give him the books one by one to see what they were about, as some among them might not deserve the penalty of fire; and although the women were both eager for the slaughter of those innocents, he would not agree to it without first reading at any rate the titles.

In this wise he entered upon his task, conning the titles and handing the condemned books to the women, who took a savage delight in hurling them out of the window into the courtyard, where they were to be burnt. Thus went *Amadis of Greece*, *Don Olivante de Laura*, *The Knight of the Cross*, and the rest of those famous romances, all except *Amadis of Gaul*, *Palmerin of England*, the *Galatea* of Cervantes, and three volumes of poems, which the curate reprieved—the first because it was the first and best book of its kind, the second because it was good in itself and said to be written by a wise and witty king of Portugal, the third because Cervantes was a great friend of the curate, and a further lease of life would give it an opportunity of receiving full measure of indulgence that is now denied it, and the poetry because the three books were the best yet written in *Castilian Verse*. More might have been saved had not Don Quixote disturbed them by shouting: *Here, here, valiant knights! here is need for you to put forth the might of your strong arms, for they of the Court are gaining the mastery in the*

tourney! Called away by this noise they proceeded no farther with the scrutiny of the remaining books, which went unjudged to the flames.

In spite of these opinions and adventures, romances are just as stoutly upheld by numerous reliable witnesses who relish beauty in all things which please and allure us: a fair face, a fine garment, a goodly building, a fine house, a noble ship, a gay garden, and all inventions proportionate, eloquent and admirable for their purpose. *No man of genius or of judgment ever despised or neglected the great masters in this useful and alluring species of writing.*¹ Sir J. Herschel,² a goodly proper man, regards the novel in its best form as one of the most powerful engines of civilization ever invented; for Jane Austen novels are works in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed; in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit or humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language;³ Coleridge would go further and permit even children to read romances, and relations of giants, magicians and genii, for he knows no other way of giving the mind a love of the Great and the Whole;⁴ the Rev. George Dawson prefers novels to histories: a good novel is the best book a man could bequeath to posterity; if all the histories were put in a scale, he believes, six good novels should weigh the whole lot down;⁵ Wordsworth finds them a very proper remedy for those dumb yearnings, hidden appetites, which are ours and must have their food,

¹ Mathias, *Pursuits of Literature*. Thirteenth Ed. 57. ² Address to the Subscribers of Windsor Public Library. ³ *Northanger Abbey*. ⁴ *Letters*. Ed. E. H. Coleridge. i, 16. ⁵ *Thackeray and his Works*. Lecture delivered at Brighton, Nov. 1864.

The tales that charm away the wakeful night
 In Araby, romances; legends penned
 For solace by dim light of monkish lamps;
 Fictions, for ladies of their love devised
 By youthful squires; adventures endless, spun
 By the dismantled warrior in old age,
 Out of the bowels of those very schemes
 In which his youth did first extravagant;
 These spread like day, and something in the shape
 Of these will live till man shall be no more;¹

and he blesses those *dreamers, forgers of daring tales*, despite the fact that *the ape philosophy* will call them *impostors, drivellers, dotards*,

then we feel

With what, and how great might ye are in league,
 Who make our wish, our power, our thought a deed,
 An empire, a possession,—ye whom time
 And seasons serve; all Faculties to whom
 Earth crouches, the elements are potter's clay,
 Space like a heaven filled up with northern lights,
 Here, nowhere, there, and everywhere at once.²

Some go so far as to condemn the poets as well as the romancers. Bentham used to argue that *all poetry is misrepresentation*, and therefore bad.³ Most of my readers will look upon this as a fundamental heresy, but it is a common pose, even among good bookmen, as Thomas Love Peacock, for when he seized upon the theme he went all out to belittle the cultivation of poetry, necessarily at the expense of *some useful branch of study; it is a lamentable spectacle, he says, to see minds, capable of better things, running to seed in the specious indolence of these empty aimless mockeries of intellectual exertion.* I consider these arguments from the *Four Ages of Poetry* too weak

¹ *Prelude.* v, 491–500. ² *Ib.* v, 523–30. ³ J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*. 112.

to support such an authority, and would like to believe, as some do, that mine author was indulging in what the profane call *leg-pulling*. I shall not, therefore, stop to argue with him, having more serious business on hand, for in the next place we must consider the immemorial objection that is with much clamour pretended, viz. that poetry is in the main a vehicle for lascivious intimidation. *The Rule is*, saith Lactantius, *the more Rhetorick the more mischief, and the best Poets are the worst common-wealths-men*. *A well work'd Poem is a powerful piece of Imposture*, he says. *It masters the Fancy, and hurries it no body knows whither*. Let us therefore be Governed by Reason, stand off from Temptation; such Pleasures have no good Meaning. Like delicious Morsels they subdue the Palate, and flatter us only to cut our Throats.¹ A company of stern readers, Burton gives out,² dislike the second of the *Aeneid*, and blame Virgil for inserting such amorous passions in an heroical subject; but Servius, his Commentator, justly vindicates the poet's worth, wisdom and discretion. Castalio would not have young men read the *Canticles: Meros amores, meram impudicitiam, sonare videtur nisi*, etc., because of his thinking it was too light and amorous a tract, a *Ballad of Ballads*, as our old English translation hath it. He might as well forbid the reading of *Genesis*, because of the loves of Jacob and Rachel, the stories of Shechem and Dinah, Judah and Tamar; reject the *Book of Numbers*, for the fornications of the people of Israel with the Moabites; that of *Judges*, for Samson and Delilah's embracings; that of *Kings*, for David and Bathsheba's adulteries,

¹ *Divine Institutions.* vi, 20. Qt. Collier, *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* (1699.) 265–6. ² *Anat. Melan.* Ed. Bohn. iii, 2–3.

the incest of Amnon and Tamar, Solomon's concubines, his *Song of Songs* and its concupiscence, etc., the stories of Esther, Judith, Ruth, Susanna, Mary Magdalene, and many such. Dicaearchus, and some others, carp at Plato's majesty, that he should vouchsafe to indite such love toys; amongst the rest for that dalliance with Agathon,

Γὴν ψυχὴν Ἀγάθωνα φιλῶν ἐπὶ χείλεοιν εἶχον.
Ἡλθε γὰρ ἡ τλήμων ὡς διαβησομένη.¹

For my part, saith Maximus Tyrius,² a great Platonist himself, *me non tantum admiratio habet, sed etiam stupor*, I do not only admire, but stand amazed to read that Plato and Socrates both should expel *Homer* from their city,³ because he writ of such light and wanton subjects, *quod Junonem cum Jove in Ida concubentes inducit, ab immortali nube coniectos*,⁴ Vulcan's net, Mars' and Venus' fopperies before all the Gods;⁵ when as both Socrates and Plato by Plato's testimony writ lighter themselves.

In all times, our own not least, there have been haters of any records of this admirable affection of love. Heliodorus, a bishop, penned a love story of Theagenes and Chariclea, and when some Catos⁶ of his time reprobated him for it, chose rather, saith Nicephorus,⁷ to leave his bishopric than his book; all good bookmen will commend this spirit as vigorously as they will condemn that of those good evangelists who tormented the youth of Edmund Gosse, one of whom would have sent Shakespeare to the rack as cheerfully as he imagined him in eternal torment. *At this very moment*, he raved, *there is*

¹ Qt. *Aulus Gellius*. xix, 11. 'While kissing Agathon I had my soul upon my lips, for it was sorrowful as though hastening to its departure.'

² Ser. 8. ³ *Republic*. ii, 378. ⁴ *Iliad*. xiv, 292–353. ⁵ *Odyssey*. viii, 266 sq.

⁶ Cf. *Juv*. ii, 40. *Mart*. x, 19–20; xi, 15. i. ⁷ *Hist*. xii, 34.

*proceeding, unreproved, a blasphemous celebration of the birth of Shakespeare, a lost soul now suffering for his sins in hell!*¹

Impossible for Cobbett to express the danger young people are exposed to from the writings of poets and romancers. Nine times out of ten, he reckons, the morality they teach is bad; for, like as not, they employ their wit to ridicule virtue; the world suffers from tyrants, but what poet among the ancients that did not put them amongst the gods? What poet, Pope alone excepted, who was not, or in our time is not, a pensioner, a sinecure placeman, or the wretched dependant of some part of the aristocracy? But, methinks, he was hobbyhorsical in this pronouncement, as they also were who so often, and so furiously, raged against his books, which they ranked and condemned with Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, it being as wrong on the one hand for men to claim rights as on the other for aristocrats to keep poets; and I fear, if they had the power and the wit, they would treat each other as that Empress Dowager of China, in the reign of the Emperor Ching Ti, treated the poet Yuan Ku, who had denounced the writings of Lao Tzu, by ordering the incautious bard into a sty and lashing him to a pig.² This intolerant spirit survives even in our own free land, as can be proved by many examples, notably that outburst of Edmund Yates when he first read George Moore's *Flowers of Passion*. He calls the author a bestial bard and demands that the book should be burned by the public hangman while the author is being whipped at the cart's tail.³ Read more about our own tamperers and suppressors in *Ernst and Seagle*.⁴

¹ Gosse, *Father and Son*. (1909.) 289. ² Giles, *Chinese Biog. Dict.* 969.

³ *Avowals*. George Moore. 270. ⁴ *To the Pure . . .* (1929.)

IV. GOOD AND BAD BOOKS CONSIDERED

In so many several ways have I shown their power to exalt that some negation is opportune by way of contrast, as a fair morning turns to a lowering afternoon, for even in the midst of all my happiness, in the delectable virtues of books, I know what a deal of dross contaminates their purest gold, *for books are as meats and viands are; some of good, some of evil substance*,¹ and I will go as far at least as Henry Fielding and admit that *we are as liable to be corrupted by books as by companions*;² books being companions, it follows that bad books are bad companions and of like account and effect:

Bad books through eyes and ears do break and enter,
And take possession of the heart's frail centre,
Infecting all the little kingdom man
With all the poisonous mischief that they can,
Till they have robbed and ransacked him of all
Those things which men may justly goodness call.³

Some argue that such books are as noxious germs which prey upon our vitality, and those writers who, saith Addison,⁴ season vicious *sentiments with wit and humour* are to be looked upon as *pests of society, enemies of mankind*; their books are like *distempers* handed on from generation to generation, breeding *an ill will towards their own species*; but I can find little evidence in support of his contention that they *scatter infection, destroy posterity*.

Nor would they argue only against what are called bad books, if I dare use that phrase, for what one age has called

¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*. ² Comment on Bolingbroke's *Essays*. ³ J. Taylor, *An Arrant Thief*. ⁴ *Spectator*. 166.

bad another has called good; and in every age, whether we admit it or not,

What we all love is good touched up with evil—
Religion's self must have a spice of devil.¹

Count Tolstoy condemns all books which lack the simple spontaneity of folk-legends or songs; he believes that *there exist no good books for the people of Europe*, and that the teaching of reading in the schools has become meaningless and dangerous.² Oscar Wilde denies that a book can be either moral or immoral. *Books*, he advises, *are well written or badly written. That is all.*³ At the extreme of toleration is H. W. Garrod, who, whilst noting that *there are periods of immoral literature, just as there are periods of social convulsion*, sees *no reason why literature should be moral, except that people prefer it*; and he as frankly admits that *a book of an unpleasant theme, or of an immoral tendency, may, as well as a man of like constitution, both exhibit talent and afford entertainment.*⁴ Even in what are called good books there would seem to be a subtle poison working mysteriously upon character to its undoing; a charge which Myers brought against the classics of ancient Greece: they *fostered evil as well as good*, and though they *might aid imaginative impulse and detachment from sordid interests, they had no check for pride.*⁵ Thomas Bowdler is the guardian angel of those who are not immune from the evils, real or imaginary, in good books. He purified Shakespeare by expurgation, hoping to exclude, he confesses in his Preface, *whatever is unfit to be read aloud by a gentleman to a company of ladies.*

¹ A. H. Clough, 'Dipsychus', *Poems*. (1892.) 115. ² Tolstoy. Maude. i, 277.

³ Dorian Gray. Pref. ⁴ 'How to Know a Good Book from a Bad', *Profession of Poetry*. 263–4. ⁵ Myers, *Fragments of Prose and Poetry*. 18.

Many hold that there is a fit caution to be observed of some sorts of books in all their classes and states, because wise and good men have oppugned, condemned, and expressly forbidden them; especially would they save the young from contact with all naughty works,

Lest loitering boys their fancies should abuse,
And they get harm by chance that cannot choose.¹

Macaulay, on the other hand, would take all risks, even with young students. *The whole liberal education of our countrymen is conducted on the principle*, he says, *that no book which is valuable, either by reason of the excellence of its style, or by reason of the light which it throws on the history, polity, and manners of nations, should be withheld from the student on account of its impurity*; and he reminds us that the Athenian Comedies, *in which there are scarcely a hundred lines together without some passage of which Rochester would have been ashamed*, have been printed at the Presses of our great Universities *under the direction of syndics and delegates appointed by the Universities and illustrated with notes by reverend, very reverend, and right reverend commentators*; and further that *the most distinguished young men in the kingdom are examined in such works as the 'Lysistrata' of Aristophanes and the Sixth Satire of Juvenal*. He recognises that there is *something ludicrous in venerable fathers of the Church praising lads for their intimate acquaintance with writings compared with which the loosest tale in Prior is modest*, yet he believes that *the directors of education of the English gentry have chosen wisely*, and that it is unquestionable that men with minds enlarged and enriched by ancient literature are likely to be more useful to the state and the Church than those unskilled in

¹ C. Tennyson Turner, *Sonnets*. 85.

classical learning; he will not have it that, *in a world so full of temptation as this, any gentleman whose life would have been virtuous if he had not read Aristophanes and Juvenal will be made vicious by reading them.*¹

If there are few men who *are better than the books they read,*² Thoreau replies, few books are *fit to be remembered in our wisest hours.* James Baldwin found that during the close of the nineteenth century there was *no more prolific cause of evil than bad books.*³ Well may J. S. Blackie say that there is *as much nonsense as sense in many learned books that have made a noise in their day,* and argue that the original and proper sources of knowledge are not books but *life, experience, personal thinking, feeling and acting.* Yet this warning is only for them that are more taken with words than things, which perchance Marie Valyère had in mind when she said that *friends take the place of books, books the place of friends, and nature the place of friends and books;* and if her third deduction is romantic, we need not dispute it here, books, not nature, being our business, although I may as well add in passing that I would rather trust books than nature if I had to make choice between the two, if such a choice were possible, books being a part of us and we a part of nature. But enough of this; books are a fair risk. *Even dead books have their uses, like the mummies in the British Museum.* And *books of a day serve at least the day's purpose.* Frail books also, dainty, shameless, butterfly books, which take more than they give, have also their place in a living bookworld, just as frailty has elsewhere.⁴ Most bookmen will admit all these diversities and

¹ 'Leigh Hunt', *Essays.* (1872.) 570. ² Anon., qt., *In Praise of Books.* Swan. 4.

³ *Book-Lover.* 24. ⁴ Bernard Lintot, 'Libraries of Living Books', *End-Papers.*

refer them to defects in the sufficiency of the written word, and those who can give good reasons for them will be among the first to agree with the poet that

Books cannot always please, however good;
Minds are not ever craving for their food.¹

Still, I hold that he is not a man but a block, a very stone, he hath a gourd for his head, a pumpkin for heart, that hath not felt the power of books, and a rare creature in this age. I have small use for him—but I rove again; to my theme, which is that some books are bad, and of evil odour and account:

Some books not worth the reading for their fruits,
Some thieves not worth the hanging for their suits.²

A course of reading is not always a safe adventure; it is dis-commended by John Hill Burton as no less than *a regimen for dwarfing the mind, like the drugs which dog-breeders give King Charles spaniels to keep them small.*³ Ruskin, in *Fors Clavigera*, holds that you must not *read for the pleasure of reading*, any more than you should *eat for the pleasure of eating*. *Gluttonous reading*, he says, *is a worse vice than gluttonous eating; filthy and foul reading, a much more loathsome habit than filthy eating*. Augustus and Julius Hare boldly give it out that *few books have more than one thought*,⁴ but one thought is more than one needs if it be a bad one and like to corrupt weak minds, as everything depends on the intelligence of the reader and the spirit in which he reads, for, I speak it with William Godwin,⁵ *he that would extract poison from them, must for the most part come to them with a mind already debauched*,

¹ George Crabbe, *The Borough*. ² J. Taylor, *An Arrant Thief*. ³ *The Book Hunter*. ⁴ *Guesses at Truth*. ⁵ *The Inquirer*.

Raise lust in pinks, and with unhallow'd fire
Bid the soft virgin violet expire.¹

The same injunction I find in Baxter his *Christian Directory*:
no great danger in the reading of the books of any seducers if you are a judicious reader, but meddle not with poison till you know better how to use it.

¹ Mathias, *Pursuits of Literature*. Thirteenth Ed. 55.

PART III

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FIG LEAVES

I. ADVERTISING FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Now that so much evidence has been set out, it would be seemly, perhaps, for me to withdraw and leave the instances to suggest wise conclusions; and I am disposed to take that line, and will; but before doing so must give a few more words to this twisted theme, in defence rather than defiance, lest anyone stumble upon the idea that I have dwelt upon it out of a preference for forbidden fruit. If I had I should not disguise it; but lacking the taste, am loth that my desire to clean up a mess should be mistaken for advocacy. My intention in continuing a little farther is to deprecate the stress which our moralists delight to lay upon sex. They give it undeserved prominence and thus defeat their supposed ends by making it a greater danger than it is, for although lechery is an inconvenience, it is not so dangerous as unresolved passion, and I have no doubt that more people are destroyed by gluttony and avarice than by lust. *Anyone is free to debauch young minds by writing books in praise of war, in praise of cruelty, in praise of race-dominance, colour prejudice, class privilege, selfishness, indifference, cowardice,*¹ *and there are few protests—none from those whom courtesy and ignorance are content to style virtuous.*

¹ Laurence Housman, 'The Censorship in Literature', *Week-end Review*. 26:iii:1932.

There are some debauched and perverted writings,

Fruits of dull Heat, and Sooterkins of wit,¹

which few would defend, even among those who have immunised themselves against infection by laughter or frankness. Yet these make no fuss, raise no strained objections, knowing from experience that laughter, which is to the soul what fresh air is to the body, is the best purifier, the only sure preventative against contagions. But, as Charles Lamb observes, *in our anxiety that our morality should not take cold, we wrap it up in a great blanket surtout of precaution against the breeze and sunshine.*²

I am not so bold as to say that it is always wrong to fear books. On the contrary, I have sought to make it plain that the influence of books is sometimes contrary to what is desired, and therefore bad, as *the Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects*³ of bibliophobes assert, although the effect of reading, as I have shown, varies both in quality and duration, and the influence is not always direct.⁴ Some authorities, as Meredith, believe that it is not always wise to be direct. The novelist should throw an *oblique ray* upon our manners and general behaviour. Whether this be done deliberately or not, books of all kinds, good and bad, are projecting oblique rays upon our minds at all times, for their influence is greater when it has been distilled into a tradition, a habit, or merely a fashion, fad, or craze, than if it has only operated upon us through a particular book.

Such influences are often ineffective for a time, but they

¹ Pope, *Dunciad*. 126. ² 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century', *Essays of Elia*. ³ FitzGerald, *Omar Khayyam*. 4th Ed. lix. ⁴ 'Influence of Books', *Anatomy of Bibliomania*. i, 333-358.

blaze up suddenly and alter the trend of a life at an unsuspected moment. A forgotten word aptly placed in an otherwise undistinguished sentence, an image, an idea, a phrase, which has become a part of your cosmos uninvited, may accelerate, or retard, the action of your living by adding a new colour and a new meaning to your days. Such influences are the result only of that kind of reading which has been of the nature of an experience; and such experiences survive within us to be handed down from one appropriate generation to another, for sometimes they skip a generation and reappear, rejuvenated by their sleep, with a swagger of novelty. Once these invisible rays have penetrated your spirit, their influence can never be bred out. You can no more eradicate the influence of the *Bible* or the *Origin of Species* or *Das Kapital* from Western civilization, than you can that of the *Upanishads* or the *Koran* from that of the East. The authority of Plato is more absolute than that of any living autocrat, and Rabelais still beats the prude with a laugh. Yet few of the millions who have been influenced by these books have read or even seen them. But that is no argument to our prudes who waste their time in waging war upon books which for the most part have no power beyond the moment, and whose brief fame would be briefer still if it were not prolonged by the advertisement of moral condemnation.¹

I doubt not that some of these fears could be justified even though the enterprises which are promoted by them are no

¹ 'It has been my fate to read many of these books, and in the bulk I have decided that prosecution, with its attendant publicity, would do more harm than good, and accordingly I have let some books go, believing that they would not have a great circulation, and would soon die out.' Viscount Brentford, *Do We Need a Censor?* (1929.) 17.

better than the dangers they would frustrate. Forbidden fruit is sweet, and to forbid a book is to increase its chances of immortality, particularly if it be lickerish, for men cling affectionately to the masterpieces of erotical literature. The eighteenth century kept the memory of Rochester alive by frequent editions of some of his poems—for the most part obscene, so that a demand for them was nothing unusual. The greater and better part of his work was forgotten.¹ Swinburne's *Laus Veneris and Other Poems and Ballads* (1866) was so severely censured for indecency, says Allibone, that copies of the first edition (properly suppressed by Mr. Moxon) were sold for £5. 5. 0. each.² Nor need such works be masterpieces before they are sought after, as wily publishers have observed. The book sales of an American play were puffed up recently by a brilliantly coloured announcement on the dust-cover that the Lord Chamberlain had forbidden the play to be produced.³ A pirated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was sold to the trade at one hundred francs, and offered to the public at three hundred, four hundred, five hundred francs.⁴ Well may St. Cyprian warn us that to forbid often puts People in mind of what they should not do; and thus the force of the Precept is lost by naming the Crime.⁵ A bad book never sells, says Isaac D'Israeli, unless it be addressed to the passions, and, in that case, the severest criticism will never impede its circulation.⁶ I can think of no better proof of this statement than the history of the *Sonetti Lussuriosi* of Pietro Aretino. This crude and lewd book was highly displeasing to

¹ Rochester, *Coll. Works.* Ed. Hayward. (1926.) Pref. ix. ² Crit. Dict. Eng. Lit. (1870.) ii, 2318. ³ Frank Harris, *Bernard Shaw.* (1931.) 170.

⁴ D. H. Lawrence, *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover.* (1930.) 7. ⁵ Qt. Collier, *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* (1699.) 262. ⁶ Isaac D'Israeli, *Calamities of Authors.* (1865.) 140.

Pope Clement VII, who censured it severely,¹ and it has been condemned by moralists for four hundred years, but in spite of it all, Edward Hutton confesses that *unfortunately these sonnets have become the most famous obscene writings of the modern world.*² Nor need you accept my sole opinion of the value of censorship for the advertising of books: many have held this opinion, and I find one opportunely to my purpose in a letter of John Donne, addressed, in the year 1600, to his friend Sir Henry Wotton, who had sought to borrow the works of this same ‘infamous’ Aretino. He is sorry that Wotton should, *with any great earnestness*, desire anything of such a writer, *not that he could infect his friend*, for he seems already *affected with the common opinion of Aretino*, whose *fame was too well payd by the Roman church, wherin his booke were by the counsell of Trent forbidden which if they had beene permitted to have beene worne by all long ere this had been worne out*, for if in his books which have *devine titles* there is least harm and *in his letters most good*, *his others have no singularity in them but that they are forbidden.*³

I should be loth to intrude upon men the odious idea that such meretricious methods should be encouraged, still less that there is any particular advantage in pursuing a thing merely because good men have forbidden it, although good men have made so many misjudgements that much might be advanced in favour of this latter supposal; but I would none the less point out that these peccadilloes being natural and in the whole unavoidable, are, in many of their parts and instances, excusable, if we do not indulge them unduly. And

¹ Vasari. Qt. Hutton, *Pietro Aretino*. 63. ² Ib. 68. ³ *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*. Nonesuch Ed. 441.

I am upheld in this opinion by many who with me see none but an imagined danger in such works, for, as Macaulay made answer in a like case, *the men of our time are not to be converted or perverted by folios*;¹ and if after this any of my readers should still doubt, I may perhaps remind them that casualties are infrequent among those who risk contagion in the cause of morality, and a reliable authority frankly proclaims that *no censor is at all injured by his work—even if he be a bachelor*.² But I will no more rake this Augean stable, for although there's a difficulty that pincheth, it will not easily be resolved, no matter how often I come at it. It was an old politician's aphorism that *a rooted disease must be stroked away, rather than kicked away*,³ and upon that note I shall proceed.

II. THE DIFFICULTIES OF CENSORSHIP

How difficult it is even to be a consistent censor of books is well known, and good books are as like to be condemned as the bad, even by those most convinced upon the difference between good and bad. *Bowdlerised versions of the Bible, of Shakespeare, of Plato, are unacceptable and will always remain unacceptable*, George Moore tells us, *for nobody is agreed as to what should be left out and what should be retained*,⁴ and, in any

¹ 'Milton', *Essays*. (1872.) 2. ² Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* 208.

³ Halifax, *Thoughts and Reflections*. (1750.) 153. ⁴ *Avowals*. (1919.) 122. Annie Besant, shortly after her trial for obscene libel, compiled a list of so-called obscene passages in the Bible, and Vizetelly, after his trial for publishing Zola's works, compiled a similar list from the English classics, beginning with Shakespeare and ending with Swinburne. Both lists are given by Ernst and Seagle in *To the Pure . . .*

event, I am with Coventry Patmore when he says that *a young man or woman must be hopelessly corrupt who would be injured by the freest reading of the Bible, or Shakespeare.*¹ But if *indelicacy*, which means no more than *unseemliness*, is, says Swinburne, *very properly considered as a reason for excluding from elegant society the most illustrious writers ever touched by so much as a passing shade of it, the rule should be applied equally to every variety of the repulsive and the unbecoming—not only to matters of sexual indecorum and erotic indelicacy.*² It is inane to judge all as you would those meretricious works composed by needy or greedy men to turn a penny by degrading what is high, and defiling what is clean (for *the best things, degenerated, are worst*)³ or the hypocrites who make the *Press* a dunghill and pretend to *anatomize abuses, and stubbe up sin by the rootes,*⁴ when their sole object is to attract the weaklings who lament and snivel at what they read and are secretly tickled and pleased.

I am here with Jeremy Collier, and agree that for such authors to say *money is their business and they must live, is the Plea of Pick-Pockets, and High-Way-Men.*⁵ But even here I must be careful lest harm be done to our greatest writers who have *played to the gallery*, as we say, to avoid extinction. Shakespeare is so notorious an offender in this wise that Robert Bridges counsels, in a wise passage, that he *should not be put into the hands of the young without the warning that the foolish things in his plays were written to please the foolish, the*

¹ 'Ancient and Modern Ideas of Purity', *Religio Poetae* (1893.) 105. ² *Studies in Prose and Poetry.* (1894.) 107. ³ Joseph Glanvill, *Seasonable Reflections.* (1676.) 95. ⁴ Nashe, 'Anatomie of Absurditie', *Works.* Ed. Grosart. i, 27.

⁵ *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* (1699.) 285.

filthy for the filthy, and the brutal for the brutal; by admiring or tolerating such things *out of veneration for his genius we are only degrading ourselves to the level of his audience, and learning contamination from those wretched beings who can never be forgiven their share in preventing the greatest poet and dramatist of the world from being the best artist.*¹ But there is no help, and the risk must be taken lest we condemn the good with the bad, and not only destroy fine works because they annoy queasy stomachs, but encourage a general moral anaemia in all our popular books: a danger already imminent if we are to believe Arnold Bennett, who finds our modern English novels, *even the masterpieces, rendered so insular by our racial sentimentality and prudery, that there are few of them he would read again except for a cash payment.*² Neither critic nor moralist can guide us; and the latter is always in danger of casting away *the nutte for mislike of the shell, like those which loathe the fruit for the leaves, accounting the one sour because the other is bitter.*³ At the same time those who fear these things should consider that fear is catching, not curative; objection begets acceptance by over-emphasis, and authors and publishers become bawds to meet the demand for indecorous writings thus advertised by our moralists. Smut is dull of itself, but it is made bright and seductive by prohibition.

'Tis a common sight to see many of our good citizens snuffling among the pornographic, or alleged pornographic, works with which Parisian booksellers bait their gins to catch such inhibited moral woodcocks. Pitiful, if it were not entertaining, to watch them (good women as well as good men)

¹ 'Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama', *Coll. Essays*. i, 28-29. ² *Evening Standard*. 21:vii:1927. ³ Nashe, *Op. cit.* i, 39.

gloating over lascivious titles, seeking to taste before they buy with surreptitious peeps at the contents, in which enterprise they are sometimes frustrated by the bookseller, who has provocatively sealed up the pages with string or paper wrappers. How these dupes of respectability will indulge in a debauch by proxy of a pornographic pamphlet and pay a pound for rubbish not worth a penny, whereas at home they will begrudge a florin for a masterpiece. Repression has stimulated a commerce in the irrepressible which not even the League of Nations can suppress, and although the chivalry of our Customs service is mobilized against the importation of such books into our chaste England, the only result is the occasional capture of a copy of a banned work of genius like *Ulysses* or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which have been so widely advertised by denunciation that their titles have become household words. Well may Macaulay exclaim: *no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality!*¹

III. THE RIDDLE OF OBSCENITY

One of the chief obstacles in the path of acquittal of these stupidities is the absence of any acceptable definition of obscenity. I have already said something on this phase of the subject, but must say a little more in order to clinch the matter and make an end of it to mine own, if not to all men's, satisfaction. In times past the idea of decency was different from what it is to-day, and it varies even now from nation

¹ 'Moore's Life of Byron', *Essays*. (1830.)

to nation, in spite of the power of the cinema to standardise moral concepts. Theophrastus had no difficulty in defining *impurity and beastliness* as *a licentious lewd jest*; but he had fewer exclusions from the right to shelter within his definition than we would have. He is *impure and flagitious*, who *sheweth to modest women that which taketh his name of shame or secrecy*; at the play when *all are attentively silent, he in a cross conceit applauds, or claps his hands: or when the Spectators are exceedingly pleased, he hisseth: and when all the company is very attentive in hearing and beholding, he belcheth or breaketh wind, as if Æolus were bustling in his cave; forcing the Spectators to look another way*: and when he goes into a barber's shop, he brags to the company that *that night he is resolved to drink drunk*. An obscene fellow is thus a vain fellow, a windbag: self-seeking, inconsiderate, greedy.¹ At other times and in other places he is different, for, as Dr. Johnson tells us, *so much are the modes of excellence settled by time and place, that men may be heard boasting in one street of that which they would conceal in another*;² and anthropologists have proved that *as the organization of life and affairs alters, very different experiences are perceived to be good or bad, are favoured or condemned*, says Richards, and he points out that the Bakairi of Brazil as well as the Tahitians *look upon eating with the same feelings which we reserve for quite different physiological performances, and regard the public consumption of food as a grave breach of decency*.³

Sexual frankness is the main object of attack in modern times, and although in times past both Venus and Bacchus were condemned as *the two considerate Devils of Lust and*

¹ Theophrastus, *Characters*. Trans. Healey. (1616.) xi. ² Rambler. 201.

³ *Principles of Literary Criticism*. 44.

Intemperance,¹ and in all times there have been specialists who delight in opposing gambling, profanity and greed, the moralists seem to meet on a common platform when afflicted with the fear of lechery, which so often degenerates into a perverted and sly love of sex:

And sure, the deadliest Foe to Virtue's flame,
Our worst of Evils, is perverted Shame;²

and it is characteristic of their methods that they know not where to begin or when to stop.

Early in the history of Podsnapery there is confusion, and although there is still no agreement, the persecution of books continues. *Have you read 'Self Control'*? Miss Mitford asked Sir William Elford, hoping she might *venture to ask the question without offending the dignity of his sex*, for the book was a much discussed novel. It was, she records, *the occasion of a dispute between two gentlemen, one of whom said it ought to be burnt by the common hangman, and the other that it ought to be written in letters of gold. My sentiments accord with neither*, Miss Mitford confesses, *I would only send it to the pastrycook and the trunkmaker.*³ Nobody, says D. H. Lawrence, knows what the word '*obscene*' means;⁴ and the anthropological status of immorality is challenged even by Coventry Patmore (and others, for all I know), who holds that *bad morality is necessarily bad art because art is human and immorality inhuman.*⁵ A recent attempt to extend the powers of the League of Nations over the circulation of erotic literature would have succeeded

¹ Tertullian. Qt. Collier, *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*. (1699.) 255. ² J. Brown, *Essay on Satire*. i, 61–2. ³ Letters. Ed. Brimley Johnson. 51. ⁴ *Pornography and Obscenity*. (1929.) 5. ⁵ 'Bad Morality is Bad Art', *Religio Poetae*. (1893.) 79.

only the participating Powers could no more agree upon what constitutes obscenity than upon naval armaments.¹ There is much evidence in support of this opinion. George Moore can find no accepted standard as to what should be printed or published. No two men think alike on this subject, he says, and no man thinks the same for any two days together; he does not hesitate to say that literature cannot become pornographic, for the subject of literature is the normal life of man, the commonplace, which, when enlightened by genius, becomes the universal.² There are many things in books and art generally which the pure may be justified in not feeling to be pure, although, says Havelock Ellis, there can never be any agreement as to which things these are.³ Ernst and Seagle believe that no two persons agree on the definitions of the six deadly adjectives: obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent, and disgusting;⁴ but Viscount Brentford is unmoved by any such contentions, and stiffly holds that those who are responsible for the publication of obscene literature are as equally criminal as those who commit obscene acts in public.⁵

How to resolve these complexities may be beyond our ingenuity, for the opinions are so wide apart that to bring them into line seems such an impossible task that I am full of wonder at the courage of Viscount Brentford's unhesitating conviction, where so many pause and meditate. Edward Hutton will not admit that obscenity is always dangerous, for the obscene dialogues of Aretino⁶ are not lascivious, they leave us cold as ice, and they may even have served a useful if not

¹ Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* (1929.) 195. ² *Avowals.* (1919.) 113, 121

³ *Saturday Review.* 17:xi:1928. ⁴ *Op. cit.* 7. ⁵ *Do We Need a Censor?* (1929.) 12. ⁶ The *Ragionamenti*, 1534-1543. Isidore Liseux issued an English translation in six volumes. (Paris, 1889.)

a moral purpose;¹ and, in the other extreme, Coventry Patmore tells us that St. Augustine, in the *City of God*, and elsewhere, says things fit to throw decent people into convulsions.² Even those who are professionally indulgent towards liberty are not always in agreement. Some would go far towards breaking with the maidenly control of letters. For one of them, our *current literature* may not abound in goodness, but it super-abounds with goody-ness—milk for babes, milk and pap; where is meat for strong men? he asks, where strong men for meat?³ Bernard Shaw holds that the toleration of heresy and shocks to morality on the stage, and even their protection against the prejudices and superstitions which necessarily enter into morals and public opinion, are essential to the welfare of the nation.⁴ D.H. Lawrence, on the other hand, solemnly contests the opinion of our Chief Dramatists, and Chief Thinkers, that sex is a thing you don't have except to be naughty with. Our chief thinkers, ending, he says, in the flippantly cock-sure Mr. Shaw, have taught this trash so thoroughly, that it has almost become a fact. According to this authority, sex in our time is almost non-existent, apart from the counterfeit forms of prostitution and shallow fornication, and marriage is empty, hollow.⁵ Havelock Ellis asserts that adults need 'obscene' literature, as much as children need fairy tales as a relief from the oppressive force of convention.⁶

The art of shocking the middle classes, as I have shown elsewhere,⁷ was widely practised by reformers at the close

¹ Pietro Aretino. (1922.) 254. ² 'Ancient and Modern Ideas of Purity', *Religio Poetae*. (1893.) 103. ³ James Thomson (B.V.) *Poems, Essays and Fragments*. 264. The date of the 'fragment' is 1876. ⁴ *Statement of Evidence on Stage Plays*. (1909.) 52. ⁵ *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*. 32. ⁶ Qt. Ernst and Seagle, *op. cit.* 209. ⁷ *The Eighteen Nineties, 'Shocking as a Fine Art'*.

of last century, and is still looked upon as a good stick with which to beat stale customs. *It's all you can do for the old, to shock them and keep them up to date,*¹ and Aldous Huxley says *the fact that people are shocked is the best proof that they need shocking.*² To come down to particulars, there are those who specify certain books as medicinal shockers. D. H. Lawrence believes that *word prudery is so universal a mob habit that it is time we were startled out of it,*³ and for that reason he would give *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, with its verbal bombs, to *all young girls at the age of seventeen;*⁴ at the same time he is no supporter of *the silly desire to épater le bourgeois; merely to bewilder the commonplace person is not worth entertaining. If I use taboo words, he says, there is a reason. We shall never free the phallic reality from the 'uplift' taint till we give it its own phallic language, and use the obscene words;* and he observes that even literary shocks have their limitations, for the young people who *scoff at the importance of sex, take it like a cocktail, and flout their elders with it, already despise Lady Chatterley's Lover.* That novel is *much too simple and ordinary for them; they care nothing about the naughty words, and the attitude to love they find old-fashioned.*⁵ Bernard Shaw thinks *Lady Chatterley's Lover* not as readable as *Ivanhoe* or *A Tale of Two Cities*; at the same time it *should be on the shelves of every college for budding girls, who should be forced to read it on pain of being*

¹ Bernard Shaw, *Fanny's First Play.* (1911.) ² 'The Puritan', *Music at Night.* (1931.) 183. ³ *Pornography and Obscenity.* (1929.) 9. Mob habit has changed since the seventeenth century, for then, Jeremy Collier tells us, 'smuttness, a fault in Behaviour as well as in Religion, is a very coarse Diversion, the Entertainment of those who are generally least both in Sense and Station.' *Op. cit.* 6. ⁴ Intro. *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* (1929.) ⁵ *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover.* 60, 14-15.

refused a marriage licence.¹ Arthur Machen looks upon *La Terre*² as an obscene book, but every judicious Bishop of Central France should put it in the hands of newly-ordained priests—if it is to be accepted that the physician ought to have some knowledge of the constitutions of his patients and the diseases from which they are suffering;³ and Henry James thinks *Madame Bovary*, which was judicially impeached and prosecuted for immorality, would make the most useful of Sunday-school tracts; it is, he holds, the pearl of ‘Sunday reading’.⁴

IV. FEARS, IDLE FEARS

Whatever is uncertain in this problem, there are those who hold it very clear that our moral leaders indulge some inward glee, on the principle that *an improper mind is a perpetual feast*,⁵ and Bernard Shaw aids and abets them with the dictum that *ribaldry and prudery are the same*.⁶ Nor are these implications new, for Coventry Patmore holds that *as it was impurity which first brought fig-leaves into fashion, so the wonderful and altogether unprecedented addiction to that fashion, during the past three hundred years, may be taken as a fair measure of what*

¹ Qt. Harris, *Bernard Shaw*. 233. ² By Emile Zola. Henry Vizetelly was fined £100 for publishing an English translation of this work, in 1888, and for reprinting the work, with alterations, he was imprisoned for three months. ³ *Things Near and Far*. (1926.) 21. ⁴ ‘Gustave Flaubert’, *French Poets and Novelists*. 200–201. ⁵ Logan Pearsall Smith, *Afterthoughts*. (1931.) 15. There is a variant of this aphorism quoted by Gerald Gould in *Democritus* (1929), 26. ‘As for sex—a wise friend of mine once observed, more in acquiescence than in anger: “A dirty mind is a perpetual feast.”’ Probably both are true. It is a matter of taste, and I happen to prefer impropriety to dirtiness: it suggests greater possibilities of fun; but that may be prejudice. ⁶ ‘Revolutionist’s Handbook’, *Man and Superman*. 200.

*puritanism has done, during that period, for us, and is still doing, —still doing, he says, for, within the last few years, the actual fig-leaf has invaded the Vatican itself; and even there we are no longer allowed to contemplate ‘the human form divine’, unprofaned by reminders of the niceness of nasty thinkers.*¹ Upon their own showing, these nice² moralists are benevolently intent upon saving others rather than themselves,³ their *propriety seems to consist in having improper thoughts about their neighbours;*⁴ and the older they are the more determined they seem to be: *wickedness in other people, Lawrence says, is an idée fixe of the elderly;*⁵ but, whether this be true or not, they are all

The entangled Slaves of folly not their own!⁶

For many years those others whom they were out to save were women and the common people. Men and the ‘quality’ were capable of looking after themselves; the *educated*, in fact, *are supposed to be able to absorb a quantity of obscenity that would wreck the lives of the uneducated.*⁷ Thus Gibbon delicately pulls himself up on the threshold of describing in the vernacular the *arts of sensual pleasure* of Theodora, with the precaution that they *must be veiled in the obscurity of a learned language.*⁸ And it is alleged by Frank Harris that Mrs. Bernard Shaw, moved presumably by like motives, burnt her copy of his scandalous book, *My Life and Loves*, lest the servants should read it.⁹

¹ ‘Ancient and Modern Ideas of Purity’, *Religio Poetae*. (1893.) 102–3.

² ‘A nice man is a man of nasty ideas.’ Swift, *Works*. xii, 465. ³ ‘Self-sacrifice enables us to sacrifice other people without blushing.’ Bernard Shaw, ‘Revolutionist’s Handbook’, *Man and Superman*. 244. ⁴ F. H. Bradley, O.M., LL.D., *Aphorisms*. (1930.) 9. ⁵ *Assorted Articles*. 13.

⁶ Brown, *Essay on Satire*, i, 63. ⁷ Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* (1929.) 74. ⁸ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. xl. ⁹ Harris, *Bernard Shaw*. 32.

Persons of quality are supposed to inherit privileges beyond those of the common herd, because they are stronger of character and purer of mind. But they have no monopoly of character, strong or weak, and purity of mind is often the mask of snobbishness, for, as Gould maintains, those who *look down their noses at a hearty joke in modern English will smack their lips over Aristophanes and Rabelais*, thereby demonstrating that *it is not vulgarity that they object to*, but *being caught out in a mood shared by the vulgar*.¹ Some are shocked to think that opportunities of enjoyment should be shared by members of the two classes. There are several tales to this purpose. One of them tells of a lady on her bridal bed who, having asked her husband whether the lower classes enjoyed such ecstasy, and being told that they did, replied, *It is far too good for them!* Alexander Pope thought it *a strange thing that people of condition and men of parts must enjoy the fine weather with the rest of the world*.² These nice distinctions at one time pervaded, and, indeed, were governed by, the rules of art. *In Poetry*, says Thomas Rymer, *no woman is to kill a man, except her quality gives her the advantage above him, nor is a Servant to kill a King, nor on the contrary.* It is, he points out, a question of *poetical decency* which *will not suffer death to be dealt to each other by such persons whom the Laws of Duels allow not to enter the lists together*.³

Collier, the father of English smugness in such matters, would protect women against bawdry and all manner of venery, believing them to be too dainty-frail to stomach the coarse jests and blatant franknesses of those times. *Can*

¹ Democritus. 25. ² Pope. Ruffhead. 276 n. ³ The Tragedies of the Last Age. Second Ed. (1692.) 117.

*this stuff be the inclination of Ladies? Is a reading upon Vice so Entertaining, and do they love to see the Stews Dissected before them?*¹ He would not waste time upon such questions to-day, and, indeed, there would be no necessity, for we have long since allowed grown women to take care of themselves, falling back as we do upon the protection of the young. *It will be a bad day for this country*, says Viscount Brentford, *when we cease in our legislation and administration to found ourselves on morality and to allow any and every form of filth to pollute the minds of the young unchecked.*² Swinburne has even a good word for Bowdler: *no man*, he bravely maintains, *ever did better service to Shakespeare than the man who made it possible to put him into the hands of intelligent and imaginative children.*³ No book, Mr. Podsnap protests, should contain anything calculated to bring a blush to the cheek of a young person,⁴ as, for instance, Swinburne's *Chastelard*, *an unpleasant book, and one by all means to be kept out of the hands of the young and pure-minded, for the licentiousness of many of the images and profanity of not a few of the sentiments are such as happily are not often found in English poets. . .*⁵ but we have strayed so far from this ideal that Tennyson ironically advises us to

Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism.⁶

Alas, for all their fears Zolaism is no longer the fashion, even for young women: *Novels and poems are read, understood, and talked about by young ladies which*, says Coventry Patmore,

¹ *Op. cit.* 284. ² *Do We Need a Censor?* (1929.) 20. ³ *Studies in Prose and Poetry.* (1894.) 98–9. ⁴ *Our Mutual Friend.* Charles Dickens. ⁵ *John Bull.* 23:xii:1865. ⁶ 'Locksley Hall: Sixty Years After.'

Rochester would have blushed to be found reading, and which Swift would have called indecent.¹ We have swung back to a condition which would have been familiar to Jeremy Collier, as I am reminded by an experience of my own during those recent days when all the town was revelling in Mr. Gay's bawdy song-play, *The Beggar's Opera*. I took occasion to offer a whimsical reproof to an ingenious and respectable poet and novelist for being so venturesome as to take his daughter of seventeen years to see so naughty a play. Yes, he replied, *I had some doubts at the time, but I am glad I took her, for she was able to explain many of the more curious points in the play which I would not otherwise have understood!*²

Jeremy Collier would save us from moral destruction by withholding bad examples, particularly from the stage, for such *Licentious Discourse tends to no point but to stain the Imagination, to awaken Folly, and to weaken the Defenses of Virtue*. It was, he says, on account of these Disorders that Plato banished Poets his Commonwealth; and one of the Fathers calls Poetry, '*Vinum Daemonum*', an *intoxicating Draught, made up of the Devil's Dispensatory*.³ He is convinced that what may be harmless enough when represented by clowns and slaves becomes dangerous when circulated by the words and actions of persons of condition, for, in those days, the quality had the prerogative of setting a fashion, even a bad one; no one

¹ 'Bad Morality is Bad Art', *Religio Poetae*. (1893.) 79. ² I have heard a story from *Punch* which seems to indicate that we have moved even further forward (or backward, according to taste). A father is enjoying the latest improper novel, and suggests to his wife that it might be wise to keep such a book away from their daughter. 'Too late,' says the good wife, 'she wrote it!' ³ *Op. cit.* 5.

followed the herd. He thus pits Plautus against Dryden and Durfey because in his plays the *men who talk intemperately* are generally slaves. *I believe*, he says, *Dordalus the Pander*, and *Lusitiles will be found the only exception*: and this latter young Gentleman drops but one over-airy expression: And for this Freedom, the Poet seems to make him give satisfaction in the rest of his Character. He is made to dispute very handsomely against irregular Love, and to give *Lesbonicus* a great deal of sober advice against Luxury and Lewdness.

By confining Rudeness to little People, says our critic, the fault is much extenuated. The Representation is more Natural this way, and which is better, he concludes, 'tis not so likely to pass into Imitation: Slaves and Clowns are not big enough to spread Infection, and set up an ill Fashion.¹ A curious argument and based upon the belief that morals are permanently infectious: the poets are lashed by Plato, he says, for planting vice in Heaven, and making their Gods infectious;² and the danger lies mainly in the manner of expression, until it might seem that manners rather than morals were at stake: To treat Persons of Condition like the Mole is to degrade their Birth, and affront their Breeding.³ He had a Victorian contempt of coarseness: See how lightly Sophocles touches upon an amorous Theme: He Glides along like a Swallow upon the Water, and Skims the Surface, without dipping a Feather.⁴ The upshot of it all is that some things are dangerous in Report as well as practise, and many times the Disease is in the Description.⁵ But a modern poet and critic, on the other hand, can stand even coarseness so long as it is not vulgar. Dryden, for example, he says, is very often coarse: but Dryden is very seldom vulgar. Byron is seldom very coarse:

¹ Op. cit. 16. ² Ib. 181. ³ Ib. 205. ⁴ Ib. 30. ⁵ Ib. 35.

but Byron is often very vulgar.¹ All of which leads me to the conclusion that, whatever the feelings or opinions of nice and cultured people, common readers are able to combat and survive all these perils, although, if we are to believe Coventry Patmore, they have their nicenesses, for they can tolerate any amount of corruption, provided only the terms in which it is suggested be not 'coarse';² nor is Patmore himself afraid of coarseness. Even coarseness is health, he asserts, compared with those suppressed forms of the disease of impurity which come of our modern undivine silences.³

V. CATCHING UP TO MONTAIGNE

I would summon up further instances, but that I have sufficiently represented this phase of the subject; yet I am tempted before I close it down to call once more upon the wisdom of Montaigne, who has so often come to my aid, and who has discussed so many of the problems which still beset us, and formed such generous and sane conclusions that 'tis a marvel that he is not more generally observed. The reference is taken from that part of his *Essays* which particularly relates to frankness,⁴ and it proves that even Shaw and Lawrence are not ahead of him. One day his only daughter, then of the age wherein the lawes excuse the forwardest to marry, and beginning to put-off childish simplicitie, was reading before him a French book when an obscene word came in

¹ Swinburne, *Studies in Prose and Poetry*. (1894.) 102. ² 'Bad Morality is Bad Art', *Religio Poetae*. (1893.) 79. ³ 'Ancient and Modern Ideas of Purity', *Ib.* 105. ⁴ 'Upon Some Verses of Virgil', *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. iii, 93-6.

her way. The word was *more bawdie in sound than in effect*, signifying as it did *the name of a Tree and another thing*. Her governess staid her presently, and somewhat churlishly making her step over the same. Montaigne disapproves of this manœuvre, but 'tis his custom not to meddle with the mystical policy of his women-folk. Yet he is convinced that *the conversation of fifty lacqueis could not in six months have settled in her thoughts, the understanding, the use and consequences of the sound belonging to those filthy sillables*, as did that good olde woman by her checke and interdiction. He then reflects how unnecessary are such ceremonies. *Let them fall into free libertie of speach*, he says, for we can do nothing, or bring them nothing but what they already knew, and had long before digested without us. Mine ears happened one day in a place, he relates, where without suspicion they might listen and steale some of their private, lavish and bould discourses; O why, he demands, is it not lawful for me to repeate them? Birlady! (quoth he to himself) It is high time indeed for us to go studie the phrases of 'Amadis', the metaphors of 'Aretine', and eloquence of 'Boccace', thereby to become more skilful, more readie and more sufficient to confront them: surely we bestow our time wel; there is nor quaint phrase, nor choise word, nor ambiguous figure, nor patheticall example, nor love-expressing gesture, nor alluring posture, but they know them all better than our bookes: It is a cunning bred in their vaines and will never out of the flesh, which these skill infusing Schoole-mistresses nature, youth, health and opportunities, are ever buzzing in their ears, ever whispering in their minds: They need not learn, nor take paines about it; they beget it, with them it is borne. He gives out that *the ordinances of ancient and wise Rome, ordained for the service and instituted for behoofe of love, are yet to be seene*;

together with the precepts of Socrates to instruct courtizans; and he cites many famous works of Zeno, Strato, Theophrastus, Aristippus, Plato, Clinias, Antisthenes, Aristo, Cleanthes, Spherus, and Chrysippus, which have frankly expounded all maner of sensuality and carnall pleasure; and he concludes with a recital of ceremonies allotted in times past to the same purpose. But for these details you must read him.

VI. PRUDES AND PERSECUTIONS

Opposite to these adventures in tolerance are those eccentric condemnations of a few years ago which are now among the curiosities of moral opinion. Well may Ernst and Seagle say that it is hard for us to believe that *Jane Eyre* was suspect, that *Adam Bede* was characterized as the *vile outpourings of a lewd woman's mind*, and that the innocent prattlings of *Aurora Leigh* were called the *hysterical indecencies of an erotic mind*. Even *Hypatia* caused a considerable tempest, as a result of which Kingsley was actually forbidden to preach in London until after the investigation of the charges. 'Your kind words about Hypatia', we find him writing to Bishop Wilberforce, 'touched me more than those about *Westward Ho!* for the former book was written with my heart's blood, and was received, as I expected, with curses from many of the very churchmen I was trying to warn and save. Yet I think the book did good.' And, finally, *Harriet Martineau*, although a freethinker, declares that she is unable to read *Vanity Fair* from the moral disgust it occasions.¹ Such condemnations are even more ludicrous than the ineptitudes of our present

¹ *To the Pure . . .* (1929.) 105.

censors, who commit the *ignoble blasphemy* of declaring *Esther Waters* an impure book, and who display such weakness of intellect as to consider *Madame Bovary* an apology for adulterous wrong.¹

In all these instances, serious works have been condemned,² and several are works which few people in times present would withhold from those who are most susceptible to evil influences: all of which goes to show that our modern podsnapery is little better than the zeal of those Mission Fathers at Tréguier, in the reign of Charles X, who were not content when they had induced the villagers to burn their dangerous books, but told them that it was better to burn too many than too few, for all books might under certain circumstances be dangerous.³ Well may Aldous Huxley proclaim: *To the Puritan all things are impure.*⁴

There are always people who set a ban upon the theatre. *A certain Woman went into the Play-house and brought the Devil home with her*, saith Tertullian; *and when the Unclean Spirit was press'd in the Exorcism and asked how he durst attack a Christian, I have done nothing (says he) but what I can justify. For I seized her upon my own Ground.*⁵ A determined prude detects bawdry everywhere, because he carries it about with him. No books are safe,⁶ for if good men focus their resentment to-day upon sex, tomorrow it will be something else

¹ Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*. (1925.) 34-5. ² It is assumed in England, says Bernard Shaw, 'that any attempt to deal with the relations of the sexes from any other than the voluptuary or romantic point of view must be sternly put down.' 'Revolutionist's Handbook', *Man and Superman*. (1903.) 199. ³ Ernest Renan, *Recollections of My Youth*. Trans. Coulton. 87. The story is told by Renan's mother. ⁴ *Music at Night*. (1931.) 173. ⁵ Qt. Collier, *Op. cit.* 257. ⁶ See note at end of chapter.

that offends them, the prude being restless by nature and the more so because he suffers from the autotoxemia of suppressed desire, leading to the persecution of desire in others as a pale substitute for his own lost passion: *For to desire without fruition is a rage, and to enjoy without desire is a stupidity.*¹ He is thus like an old rake who, when desire fails, turns from the woman's door and knocks at God's, with no better result than the perversion of instincts which might have been sublimated if they had been treated more intelligently in the days of his youth, before, as Cowley sings,

Th' antiperistasis of age
More enflam'd thy amorous rage;

or he is no better than one of those weary bards, reproved by Collier, who use smut to relieve a fainting Invention; for like jaded Pegasus, both prude and poet are apt to run into every Puddle.² Others, as D. H. Lawrence, hold that frustration generates active obscenity because it wishes unconsciously to be revenged upon the passion which has beaten it. Pornography is the brat of this condition. *As soon*, says Lawrence, *as there is sex excitement with a desire to spite the sexual feeling, to humiliate it and degrade it, the element of pornography enters.*³ Thus pornography, obscenity, and the like are the expression of revenge, jealousy, and fear. Gerald Gould believes that *a tolerably loose tongue may go with a broad humanity and a high idealism; and that those who cannot see it are shut up painfully in the box of their own fears.*⁴ The desire to

¹ Donne, *Selected Passages*. Ed. L. P. Smith. 26. 'Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires.' William Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. ² *Op. cit.* 6. ³ *Pornography and Obscenity*. (1929.) 16.

⁴ Democritus. 87.

suppress works of art is fear or jealousy or revenge grasping the familiar and facile weapon of persecution, for, as George Moore reminds us, *the desire to persecute is in us all.*¹

NOTE

[*No books are safe.* (p. 84.) This is an exaggeration, but if every censorious person had his way, and every fanatical moralist, theologian, or politician, could suppress those books which he could not explain away, little that anybody wished to read would be left. What the anti-sex bibliophobe has done, or attempted to do (for he has failed), could be attempted, and has been attempted, against all classes of books, as I have shown. But since fear of frankness about sex is the most persistent of these phobias at the present time, a further indication of its eccentricities may be useful, and amusing. Here, then, are some of the books which have been deemed obscene or suppressed in England or America during the past few years, but not always in both countries. I have taken the titles mainly from Morris Ernst and William Seagle's excellent study of obscenity and censorship, *To the Pure . . .* (Cape, 1929). The list is not complete, but it is a fairly useful guide to what, apparently, one ought not to read.

The World of William Clissold and *Ann Veronica*, H. G. Wells; *What I Believe*, Bertrand Russell; *Jude the Obscure*, Thomas Hardy; *Dark Laughter*, Sherwood Anderson; *An American Tragedy*, Theodore Dreiser; *Elmer Gantry*, Sinclair Lewis; *Crazy Pavements*, Beverley Nichols; *Nigger Heaven*, Carl Van Vechten; *The Wayward Man*, St. John Ervine; *The*

¹ *Avowals*. 118.

Allinghams, May Sinclair; *Replenishing Jessica*, Arthur Garfield Hays; *The Psychology of Sex*, Havelock Ellis; *The Rainbow*, D. H. Lawrence; *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy; *Leonardo da Vinci*, Freud; *Jurgen*, James Branch Cabell; *Memoirs of My Dead Life*, George Moore; *Ulysses*, James Joyce; *The Well of Loneliness*, M. Radclyffe Hall; *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, D. H. Lawrence; *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman; *The Hard-Boiled Virgin*, Francis Newman; *Twilight*, Count Keyserling; *Oil*, Upton Sinclair; *Young Men in Love*, Michael Arlen; *Pretty Creatures*, William Gerhardi; *Blue Voyage*, Conrad Aiken; *From Man to Man*, Olive Schreiner; *Power*, Leon Feuchtwanger; *The Madonna of the Sleeping Cars*, Maurice Dekobra; *Tomek the Sculptor*, Adelaide Eden Phillpotts; *Doomsday*, Warwick Deeping; *The Sun also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway; *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, Judge Ben Lindsey. In addition to this select list there is intermittent excitement about that stock company of naughty books which includes the *Arabian Nights*, in Sir Richard Burton's translation; the *Decameron* of Boccaccio; the *Heptameron* of the Queen of Navarre; *Droll Stories*, Balzac; *Moll Flanders*, Defoe, and, of course, good Master Rabelais his *Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel.*]

PART IV

A DIGRESSION OF APHRODISIACS

I. THE PERVERSION OF ALLUREMENTS

Some readers, out of an affected gravity, may dislike the very name of this section before they read a word; but books have in some measure and in all times been condemned as titillators of those senses which the guardians of our morals would not willingly unleash. They complain often enough of such dangers, as all know, and many of those suppressions and attempted suppressions of books which I have but now recounted are, as like as not, inspired by fear of the printed word when it strays beyond the limits which they have marked out for the protection of our virtue; for, as our good Jeremy Collier hath it, '*i's not safe for a Man to trust his virtue too far, for fear it should give him the slip.*'¹

The pursuit of aphrodisiacs is a traditional sport, but not always under its own name. So eager has been the search for love potions, philters, charms, allurements, etc., and the substances selected for the purpose range so far and wide that a list of their names alone would compass many pages of this treatise: *vain to attempt to enumerate all the foods and medicaments to which has been ascribed an influence in heightening the sexual impulse.*² I shall therefore make no attempt to be complete in this matter, since I am loath to risk tiring my

¹ *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* (1699.) 5. ² Havelock Ellis, *Psychology of Sex.* v, 173.

reader by presenting him with so long and controversial a catalogue, for I find much difference of opinion as to what should go in and what should be left out. Nor shall I burden these pages with details of those cordial pains with which some curious lovers torture themselves into ecstasy:

O that I
Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die,
Die of thy pain and my delight, and be
Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!
Would I not plague thee dying overmuch?
Would I not hurt thee perfectly? not touch
Thy pores of sense with torture, and make bright
Thine eyes with bloodlike tears and grievous light!
Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,
Catch the sob's middle music in thy throat,
Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these
A lyre of many faultless agonies:¹

Nor yet again shall I give you an account of those singular devices of electrolysis and such irritants as are produced by flagellation and urtication, even though *voluptuousnesse seekes to provoke and stirre itself up by smarting*,² as these belong rather to the realm of pathology than to that of normal love. There are aphrodisiacs prescribed for each of the five ports of love, but when all has been said the perfect amorous lures, good for all moods and times, persons, and places, have yet to be found, as I gather from the diversity of opinions expressed by the authorities upon each candidate for the honour of recharging the dynamo of reluctant love. It is a matter of taste or faith or chance whether the love-god is

¹ Swinburne, 'Anactoria', *Poems and Ballads.* (1866.) 70. ² Montaigne, *Essays.* Ed. Seccombe. ii, 415.

invoked with whips or drugs, with *strange wines, cooled in buckets of snow*, which unloose all the décolleté spirits of astonishing conversation and atrocious laughter, with¹

Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth,²

with fragrance and sweet-smelling essences which compel the mood of passion as the purple sails of Cleopatra's barge—

so perfumed that

The winds were love-sick with them;³

or with the sight of beautiful forms, gay shows, fantastic pictures, ceremonies, performances, or even lewd acts or brutalities—or the thought of them.

All this is set out by Robert Burton in his *Artificial Allurements of Love*,⁴ where he shows that although natural beauty is a strong loadstone of itself, a great temptation, and pierceth to the very heart, it is much more when those artificial enticements and provocations of Gestures, Clothes, Jewels, Pigments, Exornations, shall be annexed unto it. He is aware of the question, *forma debeat plus arti an naturae?* whether natural or artificial objects be more powerful? And although it is not decided, he is of the opinion that though Beauty itself is a great

¹ Aubrey Beardsley, *Venus and Tannhäuser*. (1907.) 37. ² Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale'. 'Among the Omahas, the same word meant to dance and to love. By his beauty, his energy, his skill, the male must win the female, so impressing the image of himself on her imagination that finally her desire is aroused to overcome her reticence.' Havelock Ellis, *Dance of Life*. (1923.) 43. ³ *Antony and Cleopatra*. ii, 2. It is, of course, not always the woman who uses perfumes to subdue the male. Men use them, and other preparations as well. Krafft-Ebing quotes out of *Althaus*, how 'Richelieu lived in an atmosphere laden with the heaviest perfumes, in order to excite his sexual functions.' *Psychopathia Sexualis*. 30. ⁴ *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Pt. III, Sec. 2, Mem. ii, Subsects. 3–5.

motive, artificial exornation gives it more force. *Why, asks Montaigne, did Poppea devise to maske the beauties of her face, but to endeare them to her lovers? Why are those beauties veiled downe to the heeles, which all desire to shew, which all wish to see? Why doe they cover with so many lets, one over another, those parts, where chiefly consisteth our pleasure and theirs? And to what purpose serve those baricadoes, and verdugalles, where-with our women arme their flankes, but to allure our appetite, and enveagle us to them by putting us off?*¹ *Why, asks Burton,² do they adorn themselves with so many colours of herbs, fictitious flowers, curious needleworks, quaint devices, sweet-smelling odours, and those inestimable riches of precious stones, pearls, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, etc? Why do they crown themselves with gold and silver, use coronets, and tires of several fashions, deck themselves with pendants, bracelets, ear-rings, chains, girdles, rings, pins, spangles, embroideries, shadows, robatoes, versicolour ribbands? Why do they make such glorious shews with their scarf, feathers, fans, masks, furs, laces, tiffanies, ruffs, falls, cauls, cuffs, damasks, velvets, tinsels, cloth of gold, silver tissue? with colours of heavens, stars, planets? the strength of metals, stones, odours, flowers, birds, beasts, fishes, and whatsoever Africa, Asia, America, sea, land, art, and industry of man can afford? Why do they use and covet such novelty of inventions, such new-fangled tires, and spend such inestimable sums on them? To what end are those crisped, false hairs, painted faces, such setting up with corks, straightning with whale-bones etc., why is it but, he saith, as a day-net catcheth Larks, to make young men stoop unto them?*

¹ 'That our desires are increased by difficultie', *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. ii, 417. ² *Op. cit.*

But these allurements, although artificial, are become natural by much usage, and most of them are accepted without question or surprise, although from time to time one or other of them is the subject of magisterial or ministerial disapprobation. Less familiar, though equally immemorial, are those products and medicaments which, rightly or wrongly, have taken their place in the legend or history of procurers of passion. And they have been equally condemned. Even tolerant men have not hesitated to discommend the forcing of love by these agencies; but I will not here insert any admonitory sentences to this purpose, or forestall any reader's opinion, but leave it to every one to dilate and amplify as he shall think fit in his own judgement, whether to wink at artificial encouragements, as many do, or condemn them, as Plutarch did, in these words: *Fishes are soon caught and taken up by baites made of empoisoned paste, or such like medicines, but their meat is naught and dangerous to be eaten; semblably, those women who compound certain love drinke, or devise other charmes and sorceries for to give their husbands, and thinke by such allurements of pleasure to have the hand and command over them, it is all to nothing, that afterwards in their life together they shall find them to be blockish, foolish, and sensles companions.*¹ But such protests fall short, for who is proof against Cupid's darts when so cunningly directed? They are the original aphrodisiacs and symbols of the rest, and *craftie Cupid is ever practising the wonted sleights as well as shuffling his shafts and meditating new shifts, which, saith Thomas Nashe, each amorous Courtier by his veneriall experience may conjecturallie conceive.*²

¹ 'Precepts of Wedlocke', *Morals*. Trans. Philemon Holland. (1603.) 316. ² *Anatomie of Absurditie.* (1589.) *Works*. Ed. Grosart. i, 26.

II. POTIONS AND FOODSTUFFS CONSIDERED

I may not here omit some brief reference to those stimulants of concupiscent appetites which are natural, as fruits, fungi, etc., or artificial, as medicaments, prescriptions, and other products of our pharmacies; though I can do no more than give you a peep, since it is a hard matter to confine them, as I have said, and as they are so various and it is impossible to comprehend all, I will only parade some few of the chief of them for a taste.

Love and feasting are old allies, and rich fare, luxuriously set out, a notorious auxiliary, even to such love as Cleopatra dispenses, for she does not hesitate to

Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming;

to employ *Epicurean cooks* who

Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite;
That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour
Even till a Lethe'd dulness!¹

In all times certain foods and special peppery dishes have been recommended: oysters and mushrooms have been prime favourites, and strong meats such as beefsteaks have many advocates: *A beefsteak*, says Havelock Ellis, *is as powerful a sexual stimulant as any food*,² and in support of this there is a story under fortunate direction. Bernard Shaw is,

¹ *Antony and Cleopatra*. ii, i. ² Havelock Ellis notes (*Psychology of Sex*. v.) that in the sixteenth century aphrodisiacal virtues were attributed to an immense variety of foods by Liébault in his *Thresor des Remèdes Secrets pour les Maladies des Femmes*. (1585.) 104.

as all know, an unabashed vegetarian, and on one occasion Beerbohm Tree made so bold as to joke about this peculiar taste when Mrs. Patrick Campbell was present. *Let us*, says Tree, *give him a beefsteak and see what the effect will be. Please don't*, said she, *he is bad enough as it is; but if he eats a beefsteak no woman in London will be safe.*¹

It is reported by Chrysippus that the preparation of the main dishes in an aphrodisiac *cuisine* is elaborate, and there are references in many ancient authors to these confections under the name of *lastaurokakabos*.² All too flourishing, laments Hermippus, are the arts of making such sweetmeats.³ Confectionery of this kind has been used in most periods, but in many instances the stimulant was not intrinsic but superadded, as our cooks give tone to a pudding or a sauce with a dash of spirit or wine. Chocolates and *bon-bons* have for generations been favourites for such culinary enterprises. Binz (in his *Pharmacology*) expressly states that quantities of cantharides were employed in France in the mid-eighteenth century. But this drug (derived from the Spanish fly, or cantharides, the beautiful coleoptera on whom pharmacy has inflicted so wicked a reputation⁴) was known many years earlier, for it was introduced into that land by gallants in the train of Catherine de Medici, in the form of *bon-bons* which also contained satyrion. A hundred and a half years later the Duc de Richelieu was so well known for his trick of offering such sweets to unsuspecting ladies that his name was given to a cachou of the kind; and Madame du Barry added to her fame in a like manner, her condiments being known as *pastilles de sérail*.

¹ Bernard Shaw. Frank Harris. 219. ² Athenæus. Loeb Ed. i, 9. ³ Ib. i, 18.

⁴ Remy de Gourmont, *Philosophy of Love*. Trans. Ezra Pound. 129.

The same authority¹ recalls the disreputable story of how, in the year 1772, the Marquis de Sade visited a well-known bordel in Marseilles, where during dinner, at which much wine had been drunk, he offered the guests chocolates which had been *subtly treated with cantharides*, as Mellefont dropped love philters in the glasses at the supper given by Venus to Tannhäuser.² The effect of the wine and the aphrodisiac was a riotous orgy, so flagrant that the magistrate would have made an example of de Sade had he not escaped into Italy.

To the great variety of those materials and natural substances which have at one time or another been in favour I must here make hasty reference by opening up a little parcel for comparison and exposition. Bulbs of several kinds have shared a preference with fungi, and roots of particular shrubs and other growths. *Bulbs*, says Athenæus, *rouse sexual desire; but, as the proverb has it, 'a bulb will do you no good unless you have the qualities of a man'*.³ *Truffles*⁴ have a long record, but they have no such reputation as *mandragora* or *mandrake*, that tortuous root which has insinuated itself into the dreams and legends of our species. How its shape is human and may be male or female, how it shrieks when pulled from the ground, so that the dog, which was often used for drawing it forth, died of fright, and how for centuries, particularly among the Jews, it has been associated with fecundity and the passions of spring, you must read in Frazer and other careful anthropologists.⁵

¹ Rev. Montague Summers, 'Marquis de Sade', *Essays in Petto*. 90-1.

² Aubrey Beardsley, *Venus and Tannhäuser*. (1907.) 42. ³ Athenæus. Loeb Ed. ii, 63. Bulb here means the root of the edible iris. ⁴ Cooke, *Fungi*.

⁵ Mandragora is also used as an opiate. Cleopatra asks Charmian for a drink of it 'that I might sleep out this great gap of time my Anthony is

Here I am concerned only with its erotic virtues, from which it is not wise to separate those of fertility. Rachel bare Joseph after eating of the fruit of the mandrake,¹ and the faith which she held in those berries is not dead to-day. In *the exquisite picture of love and springtime in the Song of Songs* the lover blends *the smell of the mandrakes with the budding of the vines and the flowering of the pomegranates to lure his beloved out with him at morning in the vernal fields*:² *Come my beloved, let us go forth into the field. . . . Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.*³ But it was the root rather than the fruit which was used as an aphrodisiac, although the berries are known as *love-apples*. Pieces of the root are carried about as love-charms, and a concoction steeped in wine or vinegar⁴ is drunk as a love-potion. The Emperor Julian told Callixenes that he dosed himself nightly with the juice of the mandragora as an aphrodisiac.⁵ The ancient Greeks recognized the power of mandrake to excite the passion of love. The goddess of love was known as *Venus Mandragoritis*, and since away'. *Anthony and Cleopatra*. i, 5. And when Iago (*Othello*, iii, 5) has poisoned Othello's mind with jealousy, he gloats:

Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owedst yesterday.

¹ Genesis xxx, 14-24. ² Frazer, *Folk Lore in the Old Testament*. (1918.) ii, 375. ³ *Song of Solomon*. vii, 11-13. ⁴ Theophrastus, *De Historia Plantarum*. ix.9.1. Qt. Frazer. *Op. cit.* ⁵ *Epistles*.

mandragora was the plant of Circe, it may be assumed that the sorceress turned men into swine by an overdose of the stimulating essence. *The amatory properties of the plant are still an article of popular belief in Greece*, says Frazer, *for in Attica young men carry pieces of mandrake about with them in satchels as love-charms.*¹

Athenæus has several references to this theme, which I shall now cite in conclusion of this account of the varieties. After dwelling on the *properties of bulbs*, Alexis names *primas, crayfish, snails, buccina, eggs, and extremities*, as more like to serve an amorous purpose than any drugs.² And to make it clear that it is not only food or drugs, nor yet works of art or nature, that are used for this erotic purpose, mine author goes into some little detail concerning other methods, which, had he lived in our times, would have included electrolysis and medicated glands, or the transmission of glands by surgical aid. Hermippus has heard of a suppository of some luxurious juice which is alleged to conduce to high-frequency. Theophrastus more meticulously refers to tonics whose power is so great that they have been responsible for as many as seventy, presumably consecutive, performances; and, to put an end to these tales, Phylarchus records that among the presents sent by the Indian King Sandrocothis to Seleucus there were *aphrodisiacs so potent that when placed under the feet of lovers they caused, in some, ejaculations like those of fowls, but in others, he says, they inhibited them altogether.*³

Robert Burton adds many curious specimens under *Artificial Allurements*.⁴ The first of them is *man's blood chemically*

¹ *Op. cit.* ii, 376. ² *Athenæus.* Loeb Ed. ii, 63. ³ *Ib.* i, 18. ⁴ *Op. cit.* Pt. III, Sect. 2, Mem. ii, Subsec. 5.

prepared, which much avails, saith Ernestus Burgranius, in *Lucernâ vitae et mortis Indice ad amorem conciliandum et odium*. Thus, Burton holds, hunters make their dogs love them, and farmers their poultry. 'Tis an excellent Philter, Sed vulgo prodere grande nefas, but not fit to be made common. And then, *mala insana*, he names Mandrake roots and Mandrake apples (out of *Lemmius*, lib. herb. bib. c. 2), which I have already discussed; precious stones, dead men's clothes, candles, *Mala Bacchica*, *panis porcinus*, *Hippomanes*, a certain hair in a *Wolf's tail*,¹ &c., of which *Rhasis*, *Dioscorides*, *Parta*, *Wecker*, *Rubens*, *Mizaldus*, and *Albertus* treat: a swallow's heart, dust of a dove's heart, multum valent linguae viperarum, cerebella asinorum, tela equina, palliola quibus infantes obvoluti nascuntur, funis strangulati hominis, lapis de nido aquilae, &c. See more in *Sckenkius*,² which are as forcible, and of as much virtue, as that fountain *Salmacis* in *Vitruvius*, *Ovid*, *Strabo*, that made all such mad for love that drank of it, or that hot bath at *Aix* in Germany, wherein Cupid once dipt his arrows, which ever since hath a peculiar virtue to make them lovers all that wash in it. These above-named remedies, he concludes, have happily as much power as that bath of *Aix*, or *Venus'* enchanted girdle, in which, saith *Natalis Comes*, love-toys and dalliance, pleasantness, sweetness, persuasions, subtleties, gentle speeches, and all witchcraft to enforce love, was contained.³

¹ *Pliny*. viii, c. 22 and xiii, c. 25. *Quintilianum*. vii. ² *Observat. Medicinal.* iv, 3. ³ Burton advises us to read more of these things in *Agrippa*, *De Occult. Philos.* i, c. 45 and 50; *Malleus Malefic.* P. i, 7; *Delrio*. ii, 3; *Wierus*, *Pomanatius*, *Ficinus*, *Calcagninus*, etc.

III. OF PHILTERS

Havelock Ellis is convinced that a large number of so-called aphrodisiacs have no effect at all, and have earned their reputation *on some magical ground or from mistaken association*. Many of my readers will learn with consternation that the potato was impugned for erotic tendencies by the Elizabethans, but its innocence has long since been established. The eryngo, or sea-holly (*eryngium maritimum*), also had an *erotic reputation*, with as little justice, but, Ellis declares, *many other vegetables have a similar reputation, which they still retain*. Notable among these offenders is the unromantic onion, and our pale and retiring celery. *Various condiments have the same reputation, perhaps because they are hot and because sexual desire is regarded, rightly enough, he adds, as a kind of heat*. Among fish, skate is an enticer, and Kisch attributes this property to *caviare*. Well may he conclude with Aquinas that *if we wish to maintain ourselves in a state of purity we shall fear even an immoderate use of bread and water*. But he is not so sceptical of several drugs which are well-established members of the class, as cantharides, *nux vomica*, alcohol, opium, bromide of gold; and, in recent years, *yohimbin, an alkaloid derived from the West African Yohimbe tree, has obtained considerable repute in the treatment of impotence*. This learned psychologist hath many details in this manner, but for more read him.¹ Caffeine substances, including Kola, are reputed to be sexual stimulants in many tropical lands, and according to the opinion of the inhabitants of Africa, says Lewin,² Kola has an aphrodisiac

¹ *Psychology of Sex.* v, 173-7. ² *Phantastica: Narcotic and Stimulating Drugs.* (1931.) 274.

effect on men and promotes conception in women, but although this is not general, he believes that it *acts in some individual cases in the manner indicated*.

In times past (which are not always wrong) the potency of erotic drugs, etc., was not doubted. Burton deprecates¹ their use because of the power for evil which they possess. Philters, amulets, spells, charms, images, are all classed together by him as *the last battering engines of debauched persons for procuring or stimulating desire*. Such *unlawful means* are sought after all others have been tried and have exhausted their power. They are thus, in his opinion, desperate remedies and no better than black magic, witchcraft, or alliances with the Devil. *If, he says, they cannot prevail of themselves by the help of Bawds, Panders, and their adherents, they will fly for succour to the Devil himself*. He is aware that even in his time there be those that deny the Devil can do any such thing, and that there is *no other fascination than that which comes by the eyes*, but he does not pursue the objection far, preferring to refer those who *desire to be better informed* to Camerarius;² but that he has some doubt is evident from the admission into the circle of his citations of the tale of a Thessalian wench who had bewitched King Philip to dote upon her, and by philters enforced his love. When, however, Queen Olympias saw the maid and noted that she was *of an excellent beauty, well brought up, and qualified: these, quoth she, were the philters which inveigled the King. Those, saith Burton, the true charms*; as Henry to Rosamund in *Drayton*,

One accent from thy lips the blood more warms
Than all their philters, exorcisms, and charms.³

¹ *Op. cit.* Pt. III, Sect. 2, Mem. ii, Subsect. 5. ² *Oper. Subcis. Cent.* 2, c. 5.

³ *Heroical Epist.*

With this alone, Lucretia brags, in Aretine, she could do more than all the Philosophers, Astrologers, Alchemists, Necromancers, Witches, and the rest of the crew. As for herbs and philters she had no use for them: the sole philter that I ever used, was kissing and embracing, by which alone I made men rave like beasts stupefied, and compelled them to worship me like an Idol.

Erastus, in his book *de Lamiis*, declares that in his time it is a common thing for witches to take upon them the making of these philters, *to force men and women to love and hate whom they will, to cause tempests, diseases, etc.*, by charms, spells, characters, knots.

—hic Thessala vendit Philtra.¹

St. Hierome proves that they can do it, for, saith Burton, *he hath a story of a young man, that with a Philter made a Maid mad for the love of him, which Maid was afterward cured by Hilarion.* He finds further instances in *Plutarch*, where it is recorded that Lucullus died of a Philter, and that Cleopatra used Philters to inveigle Anthony, amongst, he adds, other allurements. Eusebius reports as much of Lucretius the poet; and Panormitan hath a story of one Stephen, a Neapolitan Knight, *that by a Philter was forced to run mad for love.*²

But of all of these tales, Burton holds, that which Petrarch relates of Charles the Great is the most memorable.³ That king doted upon a woman of mean favour and condition, many years together, wholly delighting in her company, to the great grief and indignation of his friends and followers. When she was dead he did embrace her corpse, as Apollo did the bay-tree for his Daphne, and caused her coffin (richly decked with jewels) to be carried about with him,

¹ Juvenal, *Sat.* vi, 610. ² *De Gest. Alphonsi.* iv. ³ *Epist. Famil.* i, 5.

over which he still lamented. At last a venerable Bishop that followed his Court prayed earnestly to God (commiserating his Lord and Master's case) to know the true cause of this mad passion, and whence it proceeded; it was revealed to him that the cause of the Emperor's mad love lay under the dead woman's tongue. The Bishop went hastily to the carcase, and took a small ring thence; upon its removal the Emperor abhorred the corpse, and instead fell as furiously in love with the Bishop; he would not suffer him to be put out of his presence; which, when the Bishop perceived, he flung the ring into the midst of a great lake, where the King then was. From that hour the Emperor, neglecting all his other houses, dwelt at Aix, built a fair house in the midst of the marsh, to his infinite expense, and a temple by it, where he was buried, and in which city all his posterity ever after used to be crowned.

Marcus the Heretic is accused by Irenaeus¹ to have inveigled a young maid by this means; and some writers speak hardly of the Lady Katherine² Cobham, that by the same Art she circumvented Humphrey Duke of Gloucester to be her husband. Sicinius Aemilianus summoned Apuleius to come before Claudius Maximus, Proconsul of Africa, for that he, being a poor fellow, had bewitched by Philters Pudentilla, an ancient rich matron, to love him, and to be his wife. Agrippa³ attributes much in this kind to Philters, Amulets, Images: and Salmuth⁴ saith 'tis an ordinary practice in Fez, as skilful, all out as that Hyperborean Magician, of whom Cleodemus in Lucian tells so many fine feats, perform'd in this kind. But Erasmus and others are

¹ *Contra Haereses.* i, 13. ² Eleanor she is called by Drayton and Shakespeare.

³ *Occult. Philos.* i, 48. ⁴ *Panciroli. Tit. 10. De Horol. Leo. Afer.* 3.

against it: they grant that such things may be done, *but not by Charms, Incantations, etc., but the Devil himself.* And finally he quotes out of Sigismundus Schereczius, how unchaste women, by the help of witches, have their loves brought to them in the night and carried back again by a phantasm flying in the air in the likeness of a goat. Whether these things be the work of the Devil or not, is not settled, but Burton is careful to point out that there are those who believe they *are merely the effect of natural causes.*

IV. THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE

If it be true that the pursuit of passionate pleasure by means of stimulants or aphrodisiacs is evil, and a danger to our species, how is it that we have not been blotted out long since? We are beset by dangers. Pan pipes behind every bush, Cupid aims his darts from between the leaves of every book, and the better the book, if our killjoys are to be believed, the deadlier his aim. But there are worse gins and pitfalls for our susceptibilities. *No book, says George Moore, can excite such warm emotions as a lady whose dresses are cut very low. But, whether dressed or undressed, a woman's eyes as she looks across the table at one make a more insidious appeal than a library full of books, so, he concludes, glances must be controlled;* and since *drink and meat inflame the passions, they will have to be curtailed.*¹ Nor are those cunning adornments of women, catalogued by Burton, the sole enticers in this respect, if astute Herrick is to be followed when he confesses that

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness.

¹ 'The Freedom of the Pen', *Fortnightly Review*. Oct. 1917.

How we are to be saved from the seductions of *erring laces*, *careless shoe-strings* and a *winning wave* in the *tempestuous petticoat*, I know not. Between these and the felicities of fashion we are lost. But even then the guardians of our morals would be beaten by the *sexual revel of spring*,¹ whose aphrodisiacal qualities our properest poets never tire of advertising:

Love, now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth:
—It is the hour of feeling.²

The urge to activity of the vernal time is a notable menace, for, as Havelock Ellis advises, *all exercise, often even walking, may be a sexual stimulant*.³ Nor is the fire of spring the sole natural danger. Nature herself (whose works many believe to be so much better than the *adulteries of Art*) is guilty, if there are many of Alfred de Musset's mind, *the spectacle of Nature in its splendour having always been for me*, he confesses, *the most powerful of aphrodisiacs*.⁴ The invigorating air of mountains and the ocean, no less than the perfumed atmosphere of boudoir or opera house, are notable purveyors of this passion; and many books and pamphlets, sermons and moral discourses, whose denunciations of the stage are no more than fear of love too violently aroused, or, as they say, unbridled lust. *All great amusements are dangerous to the Christian life*, says Pascal, but *none is so much to be feared as the theatre*, because it gives *so delicate a representation of the passions that it moves them; makes them spring up in our*

¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*. 40. ² Wordsworth, 'To My Sister'. ³ Op. cit. ⁴ *A Modern Man's Confessions*.

heart.¹ Sometimes, saith Minutius Felix, a luscious Actor shall whine you into love, and give the disease that he counterfeits.²

Statues and pictures have been condemned for like reasons. Montaigne testifies that a good-meaning man of his native town caused so many faire, curious and ancient statues to be guelded, lest the sense of seeing might be corrupted, but was no whit nearer, if he did not also procure both horses and asses, and at length Nature herself, to be guelded.³ And that you may not think that I am telling you a tale, or bolstering up my argument with ancient and attenuated evidence, I can show you, on the respectable authority of *The Times* newspaper, (28:xii:1931) that, even so recently as the year 1893, people wrote very angrily to the editor of that journal, not only about the look of the Shaftesbury memorial, then newly erected in Piccadilly Circus, which some of them held to be hideous, but the naked Cupid (in a notorious haunt of vice too!) was an outrage on the great man whom the fountain was meant to commemorate. Alas, poor Eros!

V. THE TEMPTATIONS OF MODESTY

Without any desire to reduce this theme to absurdity, it is hardly an exaggeration to suggest that everything we do or say can be done or said aphrodisiacally; and if we admit, as often we are forced to do, that indecency is an endeavour to irritate sensations and appetites in the absence of natural passion,⁴

¹ *Thoughts of Blaise Pascal.* Trans. Kegan Paul. 248. 'We must decline the theatres and all other dangerous diversions, which stain the Innocence of Soul, and slip into the Will through the Senses.' St. Hierom. Qt. Collier. Op. cit. 273. ² Qt. Collier, *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* (1699.) 261. ³ 'Upon Some Verses of Virgil', *Essays.* Ed. Seccombe. iii, 98. ⁴ Coventry Patmore, 'Bad Morality is Bad Art', *Religio Poetae.* 79.

we must also agree that the modesty which indecency is supposed to outrage is itself a powerful enticer; 'tis an exciting charm promoting *a longing for pleasure that is stolen or forbidden*,¹ flattering the lover by making him feel that *laws are broken for his sake*.² Beauty with all her might, says Montaigne, hath not wherewith to give a taste without those interpositions: that maydenlike bashfulness, that wilfull quaintnesse, that severe countenance, that seeming ignorance of those things which they know better than ourselves, which seek but to encrease a desire, and endeare a longing in us, to vanquish, to gourmandize, and, at our pleasure, to dispose all this squeamish ceremonie, and all these peevish obstacles.³ Nor is it necessary for clothes to be luxurious or cunningly disordered to provoke desire. What more encouraging than a Puritan meekness of attire, a nunnery reticence? Simplicity can work wonders. Although Fénelon's costume was *one of extreme simplicity, one saw from a sort of elegance how much coquetry this simplicity contained*.⁴

What, again, more seductive than sin, of which modesty is the shield supported by religion? Christianity has done much

¹ Havelock Ellis, *Psychology of Sex*. i, 45. ² Stendhal, *On Love*. Trans. Woolf. 86. ³ Montaigne, *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. ii, 418. ⁴ *Memoirs of Cardinal Dubois*. Trans. Ernest Dowson. i, 169. It is only among fully clothed people that nakedness is an aphrodisiac. I have been told that when the famous missionary, Dr. Chalmers, went among a certain primitive people, he was distressed to find that these simple folk were so guileless as to appear without clothing at all, and set out to remedy the defect by importing pieces of brightly coloured cloth from England which he hoped would appeal to the vanity of the native ladies. His ruse proved successful up to a point, for one of his women servants asked him for a piece of the cloth. He agreed to give it to her on condition that she would wear it round her waist. The lady rebuked the good man by refusing to comply with any such request. 'Me so shy!' she explained.

for love by making a sin of it, says Anatole France.¹ Remove from sex all its naughtiness, says Gerald Gould,² all its implications that decent folk deplore, and have you not, by a fatal stroke, destroyed also its delight and charm? Impossible to understand the full significance of such temptations, Anatole France declares, unless you have been brought up from childhood in a religious atmosphere, knowing the stories of the saints, such as that of the Abbess of Vermont who died in the odour of sanctity, and one day appeared to her nuns in answer to their prayers. *Pray for me*, she bade them: *in the days when I was alive, joining my hands in prayer, I thought what pretty hands they were. To-day I am expiating that sinful thought in the torments of Purgatory. Know, my daughters, the adorable goodness of God, and pray for me.* In the little books of theology, says Anatole France, there are a thousand tales of the kind—tales that give purity too exalted a price not to add an infinite zest to carnal pleasures. When, he says, the Church in consideration of their beauty turned Aspasia and Lais and Cleopatra into Ladies of Hell, even a Saint would have appreciated the compliment. The most austere of women would have been flattered. When poor St. Anthony shouts at her: ‘*Begone, foul beast!*’ his very alarm tickles her vanity deliciously. She is ravished to find herself more dangerous than she had ever suspected.³ Perhaps it is for this reason that Nietzsche calls *purity a crime*,⁴ and William Blake warns us that to desire and act not is to *breed pestilence*.⁵ But Stendhal allays our fears when he gives out that *you deny yourself desires and your desires lead to actions*.⁶

¹ *Garden of Epicurus*. Trans. Allinson. 17. ² *Democritus*. (1929.) 87. ³ Op. cit. 18. ⁴ *Ecce Homo*. Trans. Ludovici. 66. ⁵ *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

⁶ *On Love*. Trans. Woolf. 82.

VI. FEMININE ALLUREMENTS

I shall not labour those artificial allurements, the powders and paints and patches, and all those subtle cosmetics which women mobilize for the conquest of man, for they are too well known. *Artifice is the strength of the world*, says Max Beerbohm, *and in that same mask of paint and powder, shadowed with vermeil tinct and most trimly pencilled, is woman's strength.*¹ Nor shall I linger among those auxiliary perfumes which, like potent drugs, have released the senses from the mind's dominance and tuned dull passion into ecstasy, for fashion hath made them so familiar that their seductive power fails, and soon our women-folk may seek for aphrodisiacs within themselves, in the form and features bequeathed by nature, and at their best the best of charms:

A Face, that's best
By its own beauty drest,
And can alone commend the rest.²

A sweet voice is a powerful enticer:

And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.³

Venus feels that she can win the love of Adonis with her voice: Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear.⁴

O good God, when Lais speaks, how sweet it is! Philocaus exclaims in *Aristænetus*;⁵ and Claudio pleads

I never tempted her with word too large.⁶

¹ 'The Pervasion of Rouge', *Works*. 89. ² Richard Crashaw, 'Wishes to His Supposed Mistress'. ³ *Love's Labour's Lost*. iv, 3. ⁴ *Venus and Adonis*. xxv. ⁵ Qt. Burton, *Anat. of Melan.* Pt. III, Sect. 2, Mem. ii, Subsect. 4.

⁶ *Much Ado About Nothing*. iv, 1.

To hear a fair young gentlewoman play upon virginals, lute, viol, and sing, is, Burton quotes out of *Gellius, lascivientum deliciæ*, the chief delight of lovers. *If thou didst but hear her sing, saith Lucian, thou wouldest forget father and mother, forsake all thy friends, and follow her. Argus had an hundred eyes, all so charmed by one silly pipe, saith Burton, that he lost his head; it was Jason's discourse as much as his beauty, or any other of his good parts, which delighted Medea so much, and it was Cleopatra's sweet voice, and pleasant speech, which inveigled Antony, above the rest of her enticements.*¹ Shakespeare shows that Desdemona was won by hearing Othello talk. *This was the Charm, this was the philtre, the love-powder, that took the Daughter of the Noble Venetian. This was sufficient to make the Black-amoor White, and reconcile all, tho' there had been a Cloven-foot into the bargain.*² So great the power of fine-sounding words that many silly Gentlewomen are fetched over in like sort, by a company of gulls and swaggering companions, that frequently bely Noblemen's favours, rhyming Corybantiasmi, Thrasonian Rhadomantes, or Bombomachides, that have nothing in them but a few player's ends, and compliments, vain bragga-docians, impudent intruders, etc., with a pretty voice, fine clothes and a good grace.³

If all these extraneous things are enticers, what shall we say of those more intimate appurtenances which are architectonic to the desired form, part and parcel of it, and so electrically charged with temptation, that it is found expedient to insulate them with veils and coverings lest they stir men beyond themselves. Sex itself is the prime aphrodisiac, and when

¹ Qt. Burton, *Anat. of Melan.* Pt. III, Sect. 2, Mem. ii, Subsect. 4.

² Thomas Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy.* (1693.) 90. ³ Burton, *Op. cit.*

a woman's sex is in itself dynamic and alive, then it is a power beyond her reason. So powerful is it, exposing her so flagrantly to the desire of men, that she *has to protect herself, hide herself as much as possible; veil herself in timidity and modesty.* But this is not always necessary in times present, when, if all my author believes is true, dynamic sex is rare. *If, he says, a woman in whom sex was alive and positive were to expose her naked flesh as women do to-day, then men would go mad for her.* As David was mad for Bathsheba.¹ Brum gives out that normal love is a *symphony of tones*, roused by such *most varied agencies*, that he calls it *polytheistic*. Its fetishes are the hair, eyes, hands, wrists, ankles—

Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair;
 Soft dimpled hands, white neck, and creamy breast,
 Are things on which the dazzled senses rest
 Till the fond, fixed eyes forget they stare;²

and those garments which are most closely associated with the adorable features sometimes command more passionate affections. But abnormal love *recognises only the tone-colour of a single instrument*; it is moved only, and then excessively, by the sight or thought of one part of the beloved or one associated object. This *monotheistic* condition is called *fetichism*.³

Woman is but the aggregate of these charms, if we may follow our learned men, and so tempting, Krafft-Ebing points out, that the *Gospels* have no good word for her, and the Fathers of the Church have never forgiven the daughters of Eve for the part played by their mother in the Garden of

¹D. H. Lawrence, *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*. 26. ²Keats. ³Qt. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*. 20.

Eden. *Woman!* Tertullian admonishes her, *thou shouldst ever go in mourning and sackcloth, thy eyes filled with tears. Thou hast brought about the ruin of mankind;* and St. Jerome thinks no better of her: *Woman is the gate of the devil*, he says, *the road of evil, the sting of the scorpion.*¹ All of which is summed up by Otto Weininger in his aphorism that *Woman is the sin of man.*²

VII. LITERARY APHRODISIACS

The history of this subject, as it is related to the arts, can best be read in those condemnations which have ever been the most constant attendants upon pleasurable activities. Fear of pleasure, which moves our moralists, is generally fear of passion. *The less passion in the world the more virtue and good digestion*, says Jane Welsh Carlyle;³ and any hint of effort to stimulate passion invites special reproof. What other meaning has Jeremy Collier's fierce attack upon the English stage than his fear of the *Argument of Love? To make delight the main business of Comedy is an unreasonable and dangerous Principle. It opens the way to all licentiousness, and confounds the distinction between Mirth and Madness.*⁴ He sees that love has become the governing Concern of our plays, that it is treated in the most tender and passionate manner imaginable, as a cunning way enough of stealing upon the Blind Side, and Practising upon the Weakness of humane Nature. And although he has nought but fear of the consequences, he admits that *People love to see their Passions painted no less than their persons: and like Narcissus are*

¹ Qt. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*. 4 n. ² *Sex and Character.* (1911.) 299. ³ *Letters to Her Family*, 1839–63. 61. ⁴ *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* 161.

apt to dote on their own Image. No harm here, but, when he discovers that this Bent of Admiration recommends the Business of Amours, like any aphrodisiac, engages the Inclination, and which is more, he says, these Love-representations oftentimes call up the Spirits, and set them on work,'tis time to condemn.

The play is a seal of love which only too readily impresses itself upon the wax of the playgoer. Plays are Nurseries of Vice, Corrupters of Youth,¹ Reliques of Heathenism, Schools of Debauchery.² The Disease of the Stage grows Catching: it throws its Amours about, and forms these Passions when it does not find them. So effective is this love potion that new-born passions thrive extreamly in this Nursery: they grow strong, and they grow Charming too. The playhouse is also the best Place to recover a Languishing Amour, to rouse it from sleep, and retrieve it from Indifference.³ These arguments might with as much sense be applied to all the arts, and have been so applied, for every art—music, painting, sculpture, writing—has been condemned in turn for its erotic effects, and in some instances they have been denounced all round by certain fanatics. Such an ignorant was Valentinianus the Emperour, who was a professed enemie to all excellent Artes, or Licinius, who likewise termed learning the plague and poyson of the weale publique;⁴ and our critic is none too sure of poetry, for he advises readers to be wary lest being won over by the charm of Poets' wanton lines they be excited unto the imitation of their lust.⁵

To read oneself into a passion, to drink of poetry and romances as though they were love potions, to whip up the

¹ *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* (1699.) 233. ² Bishop of Arras, Qt. Ib. 247. ³ Ib. 281–2. ⁴ Thomas Nashe, *Anatomie of Absurditie.* (1589.) Works. Ed. Grosart. i, 32. ⁵ Ib. i, 68.

senses by smart tales and lecherous discourse, tuning the heart to an amorous ditty, are all well-known methods, and books, as I have revealed many times, are believed to be so effective in this wise that they have enemies round every corner. Such men hate to be told that *the poets help us to love; that is all they are for*,¹ preferring, as they do, to justify their fears by believing that there are many people who even in our poets and historians *reade no more than serveth to the feeding of their filthy lust, applying*, saith Nashe, *those things to the pampering of their private Venus, which were purposely published to the suppressing of that common wandering Cupid*; they are like Spyders, he says, *which sucke poyson out of the honycombe, or Tygers, which by the sound of melodious Instruments are driven into madnesse, by which men are wont to expel melancholie*.² And, if we are to follow Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, our poetry contains *a very great deal of information about love, some of it really illuminating: but the language, he says, is frequently ill-regulated, and its authors have too often allowed their passions to run on unworthy objects, not to say hussies*.³ But this is not always dangerous, especially if the expression be frankly passionate rather than salacious. *The most pure and exalted love-poem that was ever written, Spenser's Epithalamion on his own marriage, is also, says Patmore, one of the most 'nude'; but all art-students 'from the life' know that it is ingenious dress far more than the absence of dress that has dangerous attractions*.⁴ But although some books are more suspect than others, apart from the

¹ Anatole France, *Garden of Epicurus*. Trans. Allinson. 82. ² Thomas Nashe, 'Anatomie of Absurditie'. (1589.) *Works*. Ed. Grosart. i, 43–4. ³ *Studies in Literature*. Third Series. (1929.) 127–8. ⁴ 'Ancient and Modern Ideas of Purity', *Religio Poetae*. (1893.) 105–6.

time limit which so mysteriously governs these raids of moral opinion, all books may possess libidinous possibilities. No need to argue this. *Half the great poems, pictures, music, stories of the world are great by virtue of their sex appeal.* Titian or Renoir, the 'Song of Solomon' or 'Jane Eyre', Mozart or 'Annie Laurie', the loveliness is all interwoven with sex appeal, sex stimulus, call it what you will. Even Michael Angelo, who rather hated sex, can't help filling the Cornucopia with phallic acorns.¹

Morley finds Voltaire a stimulant to the strong but an evil aphrodisiac to the weak.² Love-tales, though not the most effective, are the most popular of stimulants. Edmond de Goncourt, in *Chérie*, tells of a girl who experiences an intimately happy emotion when reading *Paul and Virginia* and other honestly amorous books; she seeks to make these feelings more complete and intense and penetrating by soaking the book with scent, so that the love-story reaches her senses and imagination through pages moist with liquid perfume.³ It is no surprise to learn from Burton that some women are wrought up by reading amorous toys, such as those forerunners of our popular novels, *Amadis de Gaul*, *Palmerin de Oliva*, the *Knight of the Sun*, etc., or by hearing tales of lovers, descriptions of their persons, lascivious discourses, such as *Astyanaissa*, *Helena's waiting-woman*, by the report of Suidas, writ of old, de variis concubitus modis, and after her *Philænis* and *Elephantis*; or those light tracts of Aristides Milesius (mentioned by Plutarch) and found by the Persians in Crassus' Army amongst the spoils. Less

¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Pornography and Obscenity*. (1929.) II. ² Rousseau. i, 198. ³ Qt. Havelock Ellis, 'Sexual Selection in Man', *Psychology of Sex*. iv, 86.

surprising is it to learn from him that Aretine's *Dialogues*, with ditties, *Love-songs*, etc., must needs set them on fire, with such-like pictures as those of Aretine;¹ or that the works of such a writer as Tom Durfey, once found, says Goldsmith, upon every fashionable toilet, are a very proper succedaneum to cantharides, or an assafœtida pill. The pen of such a writer, my authority concludes, should be considered in the same light as the squirt of an apothecary, both being directed to the same generous end.²

VIII. WIT CURES WANTONNESS

That the deliberate use of aphrodisiacs is not to be commended most reasonable persons would agree, but beyond a general condemnation of surreptitious dosing of others with such drugs, I have no intention of splitting hairs upon the limits of such deliberation, what it is, and when it begins to be evil; but I admit with an old English writer that there is *no Liberty without boundes: nor any Licence without limitation.*³ Even the most rampant of objectors would admit the *bona fides* of the Spring, however much he might deprecate its effects, especially upon the young; and *no matter how hard we may pretend otherwise*, says Lawrence, *most of us like a moderate rousing of our sex: it warms us, stimulates us like sunshine on a grey day.*⁴ I should like to proceed upon the assumption that disapprobation is limited to artificial aphrodisiacs, and to some considerable extent this would be possible; but the

¹ *Anat. of Melan.* Bohn Ed. (1904.) iii, 124-5. ² *Citizen of the World.* Ed. Dobson. i, 235, 233. ³ *Gabriel Harvey, Foure Letters.* (1592.)

⁴ *Pornography and Obscenity.* (1929.) 10.

most consistent objection is not so much against the thing itself as against its effects. Our Puritans will have

No wanton toys to fan a lawless fire,
But the chaste bonds of elegant desire.¹

Sound men in all periods have set their minds against gross and smutty songs, tales and stage-plays, and those who make no parade of virtue or profession of goodness are with them; and although I think that no great harm comes from adult traffic with bawdry, nevertheless, I say with Thomas Nashe, *tender youth ought to bee restrained for a time from the reading of such ribauldrie, least chewing over wantonlie the eares of this Summer Corne they be choaked with the haune before they can come at the karnell.*² Even here the fact that there should be such danger arises from a defect in the manner of our instruction of youth, with its false modesties, hesitations and suppressions, rather than from ribaldry. *The whole trouble with sex is that we daren't speak of it and think of it naturally;*³ and there is irony in the fact that those who have been largely responsible for misguiding our youth by crude and shallow education are now so fearful of the results that they would withhold from both young and old all books which deal frankly with sex. *It is surely a preposterous proposition,* says Laurence Housman, *that those who, by their inhibitions and repressions, make young minds unfit to face facts should claim, as the crown to their educative incompetence, to impose legal censor-*

¹ 'The Hon. William Neville, Brother to the Right Hon. Lord Abergavenny, Gent. Com. of Christ Church', *Epithalamia Oxoniensia*. (1761.)

² 'Anatomie of Absurditie', *Op. cit.* 43. ³ D. H. Lawrence, 'The State of Funk', *Assorted Articles*. (1930.) 99.

ship on books which deal frankly with the central facts of life.¹ But I am forth of my subject again.

The real danger of the attempt to suppress literary aphrodisiacs is that many of our choicest works are most exposed to attack, poetry, novels, and plays, as I have sufficiently shown, being particularly at the mercy of our moral saviours, and art generally is in danger of extinction if it become too bloodless. *The loss by the poet of the privilege of plain speaking is equivalent to the loss of the string which Hermes added to Apollo's lute: a whole octave has been drawn from the means of expression.*² Moralists have a special grudge against passionate works, as though passion itself were obscene or indecent. Yet so respectable a witness as Lord Lytton assures us that only *puerile sensuality is indecent*, which *the poetry of passion can never be; for passion is the parent of modesty*. He even admits that *coarseness wins charm from wit and humour when it is their boon companion*. But he will have nothing to do with *a sadly serious literature of sentimental aphrodisiacs*; if this be poetry, he says, *it is the poetry of impotence.*³ I find support for this idea in Patmore's *Religio Poetae*, where he says that *the delicate indecency of so much modern art is partly due to deficiency of virility, which, in proportion to its strength, is naturally modest; and that which passes with so many for power and ardour is really impotence and coldness.*⁴ Nash goes at this curious subject as boldly, but from a different angle. He would not have any man imagine that in praising poetry he would approve *Virgil's unchaste 'Priapus'*, or *Ovid's obscenities*. He

¹ *Week-end Review*. 26:iii:1932. ² Coventry Patmore, 'Bad Morality is Bad Art', *Religio Poetae*. (1893.) 80. ³ *Nineteenth Century*. (Nov. 1881.) 774.

⁴ 'Bad Morality is Bad Art.' 79.

commends only their wit, not their wantonness, their learning, not their lust. Yet even, he owns, *as the Bee out of the bitterest flowers and sharpest thistles gathers honey, so out of the filthiest fables may profitable knowledge be sucked and selected.*¹

I shall not pursue this matter further, for if I have not already said enough to warn all sane readers against those fanatics who are so carried away by fear that the very purity of heaven is bepuddled, and who seek to persuade us that we are ever in danger of being precipitated into hell by indiscreet reading, no added words can help. But to clinch the matter more forcibly let me draw once again upon the wisdom of our judicious Joseph Glanvill, where he gravely maintains that *the sufferings of the Church and good men are not only from adversaries, and those without: but very oft from weak, peevish and mistaken friends: from those that are righteous, and Orthodox over-much: from the superstitious and ignorantly zealous: from those that have more heat than light, that mean well but understand little. Such, many times, are more troublesome to the Church, he saith, than declar'd opposers: and Satan useth them as instruments of affliction and disturbance to the wise, as well as the prophane and unbelieving enemy.*²

¹ Op. cit. 43. ² Seasonable Reflections. (1676.) 60.

PART V

THE LOCKED CUPBOARD

I have not yet said anything about those tastes, in all times considered curious, which prompt reputable men, although they may harbour an inward suspicion of such fondnesses, to assemble, for a secret delight, books which good men condemn even though they peep slyly into them; so, since nothing that is bookish is foreign to my purpose, I will here adventure a little off the beaten track, and shall entreat to be borne with if I thus digress, and do in a way not often trod acquaint you with the sum of my researches in this matter. I do not doubt there will be those who dislike, and therefore discountenance, revelations of what they may believe to be no more than sad evidences of our lapsed humanity, and for them I have but one hope, namely, that they will honour me and safeguard their scruples by skipping this chapter—*ex ungue leonem . . .*¹

Before I descend to particulars, however, it is necessary, after my adopted manner (which suits me well), to take at least a side glance into the character and extent of this love for *facetiae*, bawdry, pornography, *per se*, for I have sufficiently discussed those spurious cases and unnecessary exposures and suppressions apart. Nor shall I defend my frankness beyond pointing out that strength comes oftener from boldness than from timidity. Better look a tiger in the face than show him your behind; but first be certain that he is a

¹ Erasmus, *Adagia*. 347.

tiger, for it often happens that many who call *Tiger! Tiger!* are put out by nothing more formidable than a stray cat. But whether that be so or not—and it is none of my business in this place—to be a true reader a man should not have so tender and squeamish a palate. *Aut bibat, aut abeat.* Read freely or not at all, remembering the opinion of a learned doctor that *before any vice can fasten on a man, body, mind, or moral nature must be debilitated.*¹

Forasmuch as this taste for forbidden books exists it is my business to examine it, the more so as it is widespread in our civilization and common among cultured men, as well as among primitive peoples.² The name, *facetiae*, despite obscene

¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table.* (1902.) 187. 'Sterne's morals are bad, but I don't think they can do much harm to anyone whom they would not find bad enough before.' S. T. Coleridge, *Table Talk.* (1874.) 280. ² It is my intention to limit my reference to the taste for *facetiae* among cultured men and women, but a note on the existence of a similar taste among savages may be useful. The natives of the Trobriand Islands, British New Guinea, have an almost civilized liking for bawdry, for they regard it as 'improper' and enjoy it at one and the same time. 'There is a certain strain about it, barriers to be broken and a shyness to overcome and a corresponding enjoyment in getting rid of the strain.' Yet 'sex is seldom treated crudely and brutally; there is a considerable difference in the manner and tone adopted towards it by, for instance, a coarse fellow of low rank who has no social dignity to maintain, and the descendant of chieftains who touches sexual subjects, but touches them lightly, with refinement, subtlety, or wit. In short, manners exist in this matter and are socially valued and graded according to rank.' This is in the best tradition of our civilized attitude towards ribaldry. They have their tales and anecdotes which correspond to our smoking-room stories, and 'in all grades of humour, sexual jokes and humour play an important part. When no people of the forbidden degrees are present, sexual matters are discussed without circumvention; anatomical and physiological expressions, phrases denoting perversions and peculiarities are freely used.' Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sexual Life of Savages.* (1929.) 335, 339–47, 406.

connotations, has many urbane and well-mannered associations. Its exact meaning (which I take it would include a proper balance even before unseemliness) is revealed in a conversation Thomas Nashe once had with *manie extraordinarie Gentlemen, of most excellent parts, touching the severall qualitie required in Castalion's Courtier*. One came in with Ovid's *semper amabilis esto*, another that it was *to tickle a Citterne, or have a sweete stroke on the Lute, to daunce more delicatlie, and revell it bravelie*; whilst a third, and this is more to my purpose, *stood more strictly on the necessities of that affabilitie, which our Latinists entitle 'facetius' and we more familiarlie describe by the name of discoursing.*¹

It is thus, I gather, an attitude of good-humoured tolerance. No one is always serious, and *Folly, like Lais, finds philosophers as often at her door as other men.*² Examples are frequent, and I shall recall some of them. But first, lest it be thought by the inexperienced and the uninitiated that works of this facetious class are despised and rejected of bibliophiles and scholars, I would have you know that such books have commanded the most delicate patronage of both printers and binders, and have been ranged and classified in catalogues and given the same care and distinction which are bestowed upon learned works. Whilst it is no business of mine to praise or condemn, I can yet imagine (whatever my own tastes may be) that such catalogues might prove invaluable instruments in the study of ethnology, for, if they serve no other useful purpose, they provide us with a true picture of the vagaries of naughtiness and of the mutations of modesty

¹ 'Anatomie of Absurditie.' (1589.) *Works.* Ed. Grosart, i. 8. ² Lord Lytton, *Nineteenth Century.* (Nov. 1881.) 772.

which I have already pointed at. Charles Nodier holds this opinion, or something like it, believing, as he does, that such books should be preserved because they are *living monuments of the language, wit, and manners of an epoch*. He says that he makes the suggestion with *profound disinterestedness*, for he has *never read a bawdy book*, although he frankly avows that he has *often consulted some with profit*.¹ Ferguson gives out that there are three main bibliographies of *facetiae*, one in six small volumes in French, another in three quartos in English, and a third in one volume in German, but he adds, *some of these books have got a bad name, not always deservedly, and have been pilloried and burned—preferably along with their authors*, although he is careful to note that *others with an evil character have escaped*.²

Whatever the justice or injustice meted out to them, such books rarely lack readers: *none are more fashionable*, says Oliver Goldsmith, *none so sure of admirers*.³ But they are most preferred in ages when manners and customs have crystallized themselves into elegance and daintiness, and men and women have sought entertainment by creating a society which is an irresponsible mirage of their own world where, as Lamb finds, *the Fainalls and the Mirabels, the Dorimants and the Lady Touchwoods do not offend the moral sense, in fact*.

¹ *L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque Nationale*. Pref. ² *Some Aspects of Bibliography*.

² In 1913 the *Mercure de France* published a comprehensive bibliography of *facetiae* in one volume: *L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque Nationale, Icono-bio-bibliographie de tous les Ouvrages composant cette célèbre collection*. Par Guillaume Apollinaire, Fernand Fleuret, et Louis Perceau. It contains elaborate notes and many English items, including John Wilkes' notorious *Essay on Woman*, and Byron, in French, with a note to say that there is nothing to justify his inclusion in *L'Enfer*. ³ *Citizen of the World*. i, 232.

*they do not appeal to it at all; for, he declares, they have got out of Christendom into the land of cuckoldry—the Utopia of Gallantry, where pleasure is duty, and the manners perfect freedom.*¹ Such a period existed in the time of Louis XV, when the *petites maisons* still preserved their rustic exteriors, but distinguished architects translated their interiors so excessively that they became *Cyprian temples*. The decorations were by Boucher, Fragonard, Columbiani, Zucchi and Watteau, and Heppelwhite and Chippendale designed the furniture. Nor was there even lacking a little library of amatoria, the verses of Grécourt and Alexis Piron, the libertine tales of Crébillon, and the French Aretine.²

Most of my authorities deprecate a literature

In which lewd sensualists print out themselves.³

I refer not so much to the strictures of holy men, for that is their trade, as St. Chrysostom where he condemns *smutty songs* as *much more abominable than stench or ordure* because we are not uneasy at such licentiousness; *we Laugh when we should Frown, Commend what we should Abhor.*⁴ Men of the world have not always approved such works. Oliver Goldsmith believes that they are written by predatory authors to give pleasure to a few very old gentlemen, who being in some measure dead to other sensations, feel the force of the allusion with double violence on the organs of visibility.⁵ Even Montaigne, who was neither prudish nor prurient, could not curb his contempt for the *filthy, intolerable, and without blushing not to be uttered*

¹ 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century', *Essays of Elia*. ² Rev. Montague Summers, 'The Marquis de Sade', *Essays in Petto*. 87. ³ Cowper, *Retirement*. ⁴ Qt. Collier, *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*. (1699.) 268. ⁵ *Citizen of the World*. Ed. Dobson. i, 233.

fable of Jupiter and Juno, written by Chrysippus, and his so lascivious fifty Epistles;¹ Aretino, that notorious ribald of Arezzo, dreaded, and yet dear to the Italian Courtiers,² is always ‘infamous’: the Scourge of Princes’ infamous letters and sonnets accompanying the as infamous ‘Postures’ engraved by Marc Antonio from the designs of Julio Romano.³

Robert Louis Stevenson apologizes to Edmund Gosse for reading Zola’s *La Bête Humaine* (a serious, not a facetious work) because *the animal in him was interested in the lewdness*. But *when it was done*, he explains, *I cast it from me with a peal of laughter, and forgot it, as I would forget a Montépin*;⁴ there is a set of collectors, alas! Andrew Lang tells us, whose inclinations are not virtuous;⁵ to Percy Fitzgerald such books are *odious things*, he denies them any right to the term *facetiae*, and would like to hear *the burning tongue of Thomas Carlyle* on the abomination.⁶

Some of these objectors fortify their feelings with a kind of patriotic chivalry and seek to foist the responsibility for such books upon other times and other nations. John Hill Burton consoles himself with the belief that *this peculiar frailty is fortunately less prevalent among us than it is among the French, who have a name for the class of books affected by this school of collectors in the Bibliothèque bleue*;⁷ Lang reports that the most famous of all collectors of *facetiae* was a Frenchman who bragged that *his own collection of bad books was unique*, and he would not go further than admit that the collection

¹ ‘Upon Some Verses of Virgil’, *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. iii, 96. ² Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 69. ³ Steinman, *Memoir of Barbara, Duchess of Cleveland*. (1871.) 56. ⁴ *Letters*. Ed. Colvin. (1901.) ii, 293–4. ⁵ *The Library*. (1892.) 120. ⁶ *Book Fancier*. (1887.) 252. ⁷ *Book-Hunter*. (1882.) 50.

of an English rival was more than *respectable*: *mais milord*, he said, *se livre à d'autres préoccupations!*¹ Fitzgerald confines books which are of such a character as to forbid them the freedom of the drawing-room table to the Latin and French languages—and often, he laments, *very elegant Latin and French*—and the chief of them to the seventeenth century.² *The nations themselves even form a virtuous circle in which each in turn points the finger at the other.* Patriotic Americans declare that the *pornography* which floods their country comes from France; France accuses Germany of slandering its fair name by putting Parisian imprints upon its native 'smut'; Ireland accuses England and the United States, and a pious hope is often expressed that Irish youth will be Gaelicized as soon as possible, so that the language bar thus created may save them from English filth!³ It would be tedious to continue these evidences, for, as all know, every country has its *facetiae*, and the attempt to throw the blame upon a foreigner may be but one more manifestation of that zeno-phobia which has plagued men from earliest times, which is no more than Montaigne intends when he says that *Every man poiseth upon his fellowes sinne, and elevates his own;*⁴

Or does it simply mean
That the English tourist has a very useful flair
For the thoroughly obscene?⁵

This also I must observe in passing, that there is a fashion in *facetiae* as in other books. At one time men (and women

¹ *The Library.* (1892.) 120. ² *Book Fancier.* (1887.) 251. ³ Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* (1929.) 193–4. ⁴ 'Of Drunkennesse', *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. ii, 12. ⁵ Daniel George, *To-morrow Will be Different.* (1932.) 81. It is perhaps fair to point out that not all our mentors have blamed the foreigner—Jeremy Collier was under no illusions about his countrymen. 'There are no smutty songs in their [the Greeks'] Plays; in which the English are extremely scandalous.' *Op. cit.* 24.

too, sometimes) will laugh at a light and airy treatment of a forbidden theme; at another time the pedestrian measure, or even the ponderous tread, is approved. But this will become apparent as we proceed. Greater changes even than those brought about by fashion have been thrust upon us by variations in our customs and habits, as I have shown and as will further appear. And it is a curious fact that the majority of those who enjoy *facetiae* are filled with righteous indignation at the thought of the frank and serious treatment of sex by 'advanced' or reformist poets and novelists. The true lover of *facetiae* prefers to treat all amorous affairs but those with which he himself is concerned in the spirit of comedy or farce. But to pull this matter together, suffice it that I recall a story given by Isaac D'Israeli to illustrate the contempt with which the classics were treated by the monks of the Middle Ages. *To read the classics, he says, was considered a very idle recreation, and some held them in great horror*, and to distinguish these profane works from more holy books a *disgraceful sign* had been invented. When a monk went to the library in search of a Pagan author he would first make the general sign *used in their manual and silent language* when they wanted a book, afterwards using a particular sign which *consisted in scratching under his ear, as a dog, which feels an itching, scratches himself in that place with his paw—because an unbeliever is compared to a dog*, and by this sign *they expressed an itching for those dogs Virgil and Horace.*¹

Many noblemen, scholars, and even ministers of religion, have diverted their leisure hours by collecting or disseminating *facetiae*. Selwyn has an instance of a noble lord of his

¹ 'Recovery of Manuscripts', *Cur. of Lit.* (1824.) i, 29.

acquaintance who imported some thirty copies of Crébillon's stories, which he disposed of to his loose friends;¹ and there was an English earl who in 1789 'privately' reprinted the works of one Baffo, an Italian writer, styled *Le Rimeur le plus obscène et le plus sale de son temps*, to give away as presents. Mr. Beckford, says mine author, enjoyed the privilege of a copy, which was sold for £11, solely on its claim to saleté.² Alfred Bonnardot, in his *Mirror of the Parisian Bibliophile*, tells how M. Jehan Vechel, himself a cuckold, had a collection of 132 volumes on cuckoldry. The volumes were kept in a bookcase which had a secret lock, but the curious bibliophile would delight to exhibit his treasures to a fellow amateur. Now here are two very diverting little manuscripts, ornamented with the drollest miniatures, he would say. Do you want to see some incredible, matchless, inestimable items? Explore! Out from their nesting-place would be drawn the *Danse macabre des cocquz*, Paris, 1506; *La Fleur des calamitez du mariage*, 1517; *Le douce consolacion des marys navrés*, 1523; *Les marys jallouz prins à la pipée*, 1562; *L'apologie des cornards*, Lyon, 1601, etc., all illustrated by woodcuts or copper plates. And Vechel would ask enthusiastically whether his *Inferno*, as they call it among the Jesuits, was not rather prettily populated.³

Samuel Pepys was a reader rather than a collector of forbidden works, and he never conquered although he always condemned this taste. One of his most notable adventures was with *L'Escole des Filles*, by Helot, a book which suffered martyrdom, for it was burnt at the foot of the gallows

¹ Percy Fitzgerald, *Book Fancier*. (1887.) 252. ² Ib. 252. ³ *The Mirror of the Parisian Bibliophile*. Alfred Bonnardot. (1848.) Trans. Koch. (1931.) 85-7. The titles of the books are fictitious.

together with the effigy of the author. Pepys first saw this work on January 13th, 1667. *Homeward by coach*, he records,¹ and stopped at Martin's, my bookseller, where I saw the French book which I did think to have had for my wife to translate, called 'L'escholle des Filles', but when I come to look in it, it is the most bawdy, lewd book that ever I saw, rather worse than 'Putana errante',² so that I was ashamed of reading in it, and so away home. But in less than a month his impression of the naughty work gets the better of his respectability, and away to the Strand to my bookseller's, and there staid an hour, and bought the idle, rogueish book . . . in plain binding, avoiding the buying of it better bound, because I resolve, as soon as I have read it, to burn it, that it may not stand in my list of books, nor among them, to disgrace them if it should be found. Next day was Sunday and Pepys was up and at his office in the morning, doing business, and also reading a little of 'L'escholle des filles', which, he again exclaims, is a mighty lewd book, but yet not amiss for a sober man once to read over to inform himself in the villainy of the world. After dinner that day they sang songs in the dining-room until almost night, and drank mighty good store of wine, and then Mr. Pepys retired to his chamber, where, he confesses, I read through 'L'escholle des Filles', a lewd book, but what do no wrong once to read for information sake. . . . And after I had done it I burned it that it might not be among my books to my shame, and so at night to supper and to bed.³

The pursuit of such facetious works, with its many difficulties, is the subject of several stories, one of which, taken

¹ *Diary*. Ed. Wheatley. (1896.) vii, 279. ² *Puttana errante*, by Pietro Aretino. Venice, 1531. ³ *Ib.* vii, 310-12.

from an old book,¹ reveals an attempt to print the *Sonnettis* of Pietro Aretino, embellished with the engraved postures, on the Clarendon Press. *I assure you*, Dr. Prideaux tells his friend, *we were like to have an edition of them from thence, were it not that last night² the whole work was mar'd*. The heroes of this adventure were certain gentlemen of *All Souls*, and they had discreetly chosen the *evenning after 4*, Mr. Dean³ *after that never using to go to the Sheldonian Theatre*, then the home of the Press. But, continues Dr. Prideaux, *last night being imploied the other part of the day he went in thither till the work was begun. How he tooke to find his Presse working at such imployment, I leave it to you to imagin.* He seized the printed sheets and the plates, demanded the recall of some sixty of the cuts that *had gon abroad before the businesse was discovered* and threatened the owners of them with expulsion. *And I thinke they would deserve it*, he continues, *were they of any other colledge, than All Souls, but there I will allow them to be virtuous that are bawdy only in pictures.* Mr. Dean therefore concludes the incident by committing the offending prints to the fire.⁴

Lest you conclude hastily that this foible is peculiar to men I must disillusion you at once, for women have ventured into these curious realms, and, so far as I can discover, without coming to any harm. Madame de Sévigné would entertain herself at Les Rochers with books of all kinds, but

¹ *Letters to John Ellis.* Humphrey Prideaux. (Camden Soc. 1875.)

² January 23rd, 1674. ³ Dr. John Fell. ⁴ This story is given by Falconer Madan in 'Oxford Literature', 1651-1680, *Oxford Books*, Vol. III (1931). The plates were the familiar ones of Marco Antonio after designs by Julio Romano. Mr. Madan says that 'Fell's suppression was apparently complete and no copies are known to exist: nor am I aware of any reference to the Oxford incident outside Prideaux's letters.'

she does not hesitate to be adventurous, even for those times, when she is so minded, and she stoutly upholds her tastes. *I am almost afraid to tell you, she writes to her daughter* (5:vii: 1671), *that I am returned to 'Cleopatra', and by good fortune the short memory I have makes it still pleasing to me: I have a horrid taste, you'll say; but you know I cannot bear those prudish airs which are not natural to me; and as I am not yet arrived at such a time of life as forbids the reading of such works, I suffer myself to be amused by them under the pretence that my son brought me into it.* And this urbane lady concludes by recording that her son used to read us some chapters out of *Rabelais*, which were enough to make one die of laughing.¹

Another great lady of the time who has equally bold literary tastes is Christina of Sweden, of whom I can recount a good story out of *Huet*.² Nothing pleases that princess more than the company of learned men, and among those she attracts to her Court at Stockholm is Saumise, who has the ill luck to be laid up with gout during his visit. One day, says *Huet*, whilst he was amusing himself and endeavouring to forget his pain by reading a facetious, but somewhat indelicate book, entitled '*Le Moyen Parvenir*', said to be written by Francis Beroalde de Verville, the Queen suddenly entered his room. Saumise slips the book under the bed clothes lest the Queen, if she saw it, should take offence. Her quick and curious eyes detect the ruse; she grabs the book and glances over a few of the verses, smiling at their high-flavoured humour. She called her favourite Sparre, a young lady of beauty and rank, to whom she pointed out certain passages, ordering her to read them; which, notwithstanding her confusion and blushes, she was obliged to do

¹ Letters. (1927.) i, 190. ² Memoirs. Trans. Aikin. i, 196-7.

to the great diversion of her attendants. The good Bishop of Avranches¹ had this story from Saumise himself, and that *I might more perfectly understand the whole affair*, he says, *Saumise ordered the work to be procured from the Leyden booksellers, and presented it to me elegantly bound.*

Once more it is obvious that there is no unanimity of opinion upon a subject which concerns so many of us. I have shown how worthy men have relished *facetiae*, how men as worthy have deplored that taste, and doubtless it could be shown that many worthy men enjoy privately what they condemn in public. I even know of some instances where two opposite opinions exist in the same man, though not concerning the same books. Montaigne, as I have shown, cannot enjoy the *Epistles of Chrysippus*, but he esteems *Boccaccio*, *Rabelais*, and *The Kisses of Johannes Secundus*.² Coleridge thinks highly of *Tristram Shandy*, and if *the latter part about the widow Wadman is stupid and disgusting*, and *Sterne's morals are bad, the oddity and erudite grimaces under which much of his dirt is hidden take away the effect for the most part*.³ And I find one reputable historian who is brave enough to give Aretino a good word—Aretino the greatest of all ribalds, whose works are *full of queer instances and odd comparisons, glittering with wit and every sort of comic exaggeration*, not to be found elsewhere, but which possess the *robust joy*

¹ Dignitaries of the Church are often more tolerant and urbane than some of the members of their flocks. The literary tastes of the Popes and Cardinals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were probably very adventurous. Even Pope Leo XIII was no prude. ‘And how’s the good Paul de Kock?’ was the first question he asked Brunetière, when the famous critic visited the Vatican. *L’Enfer de la Bibliothèque Nationale*. 346.

² ‘Of Bookes’, *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. ii, 112. ³ *Table Talk*. (1874.) 280.

of Rabelais, and something of the intellectual charm of Molière. He takes us not only in spite of ourselves, but in spite of his own animalism and coarseness. He fascinates us with his good-for-nothing but candid women who are so pretty and so amusing, and yet as we know all the time such lamentable, mournful, and even nauseating beings.¹ Thomas Gray, whose ideal of love is those domestic affections which are so elegantly wrought out in his great *Elegy*, wishes to be always lying on sofas reading eternal new novels by Crébillon and Marivaux.² Charles Lamb is of this good company. He confesses openly that he is glad for a season to take an airing beyond the diocese of the strict conscience—not to live always in the precincts of the law-courts—but now and then, for a dream-while or so, to imagine a world with no meddling restrictions—to get into recesses, whither the hunter cannot follow him:

Secret shades
Of woody Ida's inmost grove,
While yet there was no fear of Jove.

And he comes back to his cage and his restraint the fresher and more healthy for the adventure, wearing his Shackles more contentedly for having respired the breath of an imaginary freedom. I do not know, he says, how it is with others, but I feel the better always for the perusal of one of Congreve's—nay, why should I not add even of Wycherley's—comedies.³

I can adduce no evidence better worth the respect of sane and tolerant men than the confessions of such admirable men as Montaigne, Gray, and Lamb, and since it is not my purpose to preach or persuade, I will close with them, and call

¹Edward Hutton, *Pietro Aretino*. (1922.) 253. ²Letters. ³'On the Artificial Comedy of Last Century', *Essays of Elia*.

upon Meredith for my peroration, believing, as I do, that my witnesses would be with him (and me) in believing that laughter is the best prophylactic against both sodden lechery and lumpish goodness; not any laughter, but *the laughter directed by the comic spirit—a harmless wine, conducing to sobriety in the degree that it enlivens, because it enters you like fresh air into a study; as when one of the sudden contrasts of the comic idea floods the brain like reassuring daylight.*¹

¹ *The Idea of Comedy.* (1898.) 93. This remedy, however, is not uncontested. Jeremy Collier believes that 'To go to Heaven in jest, is the way to Hell in earnest.' *Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* 62; and Bishop Wilson holds that 'to make a jest of sins of uncleanness, is too sure a sign that we apprehend not the sad punishment due to such sins.' *Maxims of Piety and of Christianity.*

PART VI

WOMEN AND THE FEAR OF BOOKS

I. BIBLIOPHILY A MASCULINE PASSION

The day is not very far distant, Dibdin asserts,¹ *when females will begin to have as high a relish for Large Paper copies as their male rivals.* That day is not yet come, nor is it, as they say, in the offing. Women are not collectors, nor are they lovers of aught save love and what pertains to it. They are notable readers, as I have confessed apart, but, in spite of the announcement that the *bon M. Ernouf* has discovered, in St. Wiborade, a celestial protector of books who is a woman,² it is only rarely that women have any affection for the books which delight them: *amours de femme et de bouquin ne se chantent pas au même lutrin;*³ and I find few such references to book-love among their writings as that of Sara P. Paton,⁴ who loves, modestly *at a distance*, by proxy, as it were, some favourite author, whose sweet fancies, glowing thoughts, etc., *have winged your lonely hours; then you may close the book, and lean your cheek against the cover*, not out of love of the book, but because it recalls *the face of a dear friend, or the adorable soul of the author.*

¹ *Bibliomania.* (1811.) 531. ² Mouravit, *Le Livre et la Petite Bibliothèque d'Amateur.* 45. See also the article by Ernouf, 'Une Martyre Bibliophile', in the *Bull. du Biblioph.* xiv, 1429, *et seq.* ³ 'The loves of woman and of books cannot be sung on the same lyre.' Jacob. Qt. Uzanne, *Zigzags d'un Curieux.* 31. ⁴ *Fern Leaves.* Qt. In *Praise of Books.* Swan. 87.

Women bibliophiles! exclaims Octave Uzanne,¹ *I know not two words which screech more when they find themselves together.* He cannot imagine a *union more hypocritical*, or one which *smacks more of divorce*, for with rare exceptions, *la femme et la bibliofolie vivent aux antipodes*, no *sympathie profonde et intime* exists between them and books: *aucune passion d'épiderme ou d'esprit*. A woman in a library is a woman out of her frame. She brings grace, smiles, perfumes, and suchlike charms, which soften the austerity of a library with exquisite sweetness, a *gentillesse exquise*; but beware, she is no more to be trusted than *une guenon familière*, a domestic monkey. *Prenez garde* of her whims, caprices; let her not handle precious prints, bindings, etc.: *ce serait un désastre!*² To which purpose Lang brings the story of a *literary lady* discovered reading over the fire a *privately printed vellum-bound copy on large paper* so that the covers curled *wide open like the shells of an afflicted oyster*, and in spite of his protestations she went on *toasting* the work.³ Other authorities would make a case for women in this matter of bibliophilia, claiming many women collectors of old time as of the true faith; but at best they are special pleaders, and if they discover one or two bearing the outward signs of the book-lover they prove but little: *two swallows do not make a summer*. Go below the surface and you find an ulterior motive. A notable exception among French women is the Comtesse de Verrue, *a genuine and even fanatical collector*,⁴ and in our own country Miss Richardson Currer,⁵ of Eshton Hall, in Craven,

¹ Qt. *Zigzags d'un Curieux*. 30. ² Ib. 34. ³ 'Lady Book-Lovers', *Books and Bookmen*. 137. ⁴ Ib. 145. ⁵ 'Richard Heber at one time contemplated marrying her; was he more interested in the lady or in her books?' Seymour de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books and Manuscripts*. 141.

Yorkshire, who formed a great library, *a Book-Paradise*.¹ She was a genuine *bibliophile*, reading and loving her books; not, says my author,² *a collector of the caprice of a day*; she collected and read from earliest youth, her *means* enabling her to *gratify this passion to an extent of placing her at the head of all female collectors in Europe*. Nor are these *rarae aves* extinct, and least so in America, where Amy Lowell captured all the still unattached Keatsiana of any quality. She wrote a large work on Keats, and *believed herself spiritually attuned to him*, says Rosenbach, who was able to gratify her desire for Keats's own copy of *Shakespeare*, with his notes through it, which she wanted *more than anything in the world!* The magician of book-finders smiled, for by one of those *unusual chances which make truth stranger than fiction*, he had the *very volume* in his pocket. *She caught her breath*, he says, *and grew quite pale with joy as I handed it to her.*³

No one has sought more to establish women in this respect than Ernest Quentin-Bauchart. In his two volumes of *Women Bibliophiles*, with its learned list of *bibliothégraphiques*. From Louisa of Savoy, Regent of France (1486–1531), through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he catalogues a procession of noble dames, fair ladies, circumspect or frail, wise and witty, who, in his view, are worthy the name of *bibliophile*. Well may Octave Uzanne⁴ call this work *le Livre d'or des femmes bibliophiles de France aux trois grands siècles de notre histoire*. Even though he does not deny them the faculty of book-love, he is none the less convinced that *ces aimables femmes bibliophiles n'eurent jamais pour les beaux livres cette*

¹Dibdin, *Reminiscences*. ii, 953. ²Ib. ii, 949. ³Rosenbach, *Books and Bidders*. 40. ⁴Zigzags d'un Curieux. 39.

même passion sincère,¹ as that which moved Grolier, de Thou, Longpierre, Peiresc, La Vallière, etc. *There can be no doubt*, says Andrew Lang,² *that these ladies were possessors of exquisite printed books and manuscripts wonderfully bound, but it remains uncertain whether the owners, as a rule, were bibliophiles; whether their hearts were with their treasures.* To clinch his argument, bring it home in triumph, he insinuates that, *incredible as it may seem to us now*, literature was then *highly respected and even fashionable*; poets were court favourites, and those who would be thought great *must possess books*, and not only books, but *books produced in the utmost perfection of art, and bound with all the skill at the disposal of Clovis Eve, and Padeloup, and Duseuil*; and, he concludes, *as Fashion gave her commands, we cannot hastily affirm that the ladies who obeyed her were really book-lovers*, and he suspects *an aversion to the mere coquetry and display of morocco and red letters, and the toys which amuse the minds of men.*³

There is, as usual, some confusion of terms here which will be unravelled as this investigation proceeds, for although the Eltons believe that in all the lists of bookish *ladies of old time*, as those of Guigard, Quentin-Bauchart or Uzanne, *it is difficult to find one who preferred the inside to the outside of the book*,⁴ yet Lang discerns among women *a fine contempt for everything but the spiritual aspect of literature*.⁵ All of which is again contradicted by Uzanne: *On peut se convaincre, à la lecture de ce répertoire nominal, que, parmi tant de femmes bibliophiles de la plus haute marque, il n'en est guère qui se soient élevées par le livre et chez lesquelles cette délicieuse toquade virile ait pu avoir prise*

¹ *Zigzags d'un Curieux*. 36. ² *Lady Book-Lovers', Books and Bookmen*. 135.

³ *Ib.* 137. ⁴ Elton, *Great Book-Collectors*. 109. ⁵ *Op. cit.* 137.

sérieusement.¹ He is convinced on reading Quentin-Bauchart's catalogue of distinguished women bibliophiles that few of them can have been seriously taken with that manly hobby. Quentin-Bauchart himself confesses that many great ladies in past centuries had books but knew nothing of their contents, therefore *le titre de bibliophile ne leur est guère applicable*. Once acquired and rebound, the book was arranged more or less neatly in *une armoire luxueuse*, and that was all, *et elles s'en tenaient là*.² They had a *cabinet* just as they had *une ruelle*, *un salon*, or *un boudoir*; *c'était alors le complément indispensable de la vie princière*; but with the exception of Madame de Chamillart (Saint-Simon's *la meilleure et la plus sotte femme du monde et la plus inutile à son mari*),³ Madame de Pompadour, *une artiste véritable*, and *la petite Vaubernier*, Comtesse du Barry, he does not believe in the *tempérament bibliophilesque* of the *majorité* of those women who have left to posterity such numbers of volumes *superbement décorés*, où *l'or*, *les mosaïques* et *leurs armoiries se relèvent en bosse sur l'éclat des plus merveilleux maroquins*;⁴ but in the main, whether they were *honnêtes dames d'austère ou même de petite vertu*, queens of the right or the left,⁵ and although their coats of arms excite the interest of bibliophiles, they themselves were moved by custom, fashion, ambition, etc., rather than love of books.

It was also a tradition of the *Hétaires royales* and the *Cours d'Amour* to respect art and letters, so that an elegant case of desirable books in the boudoir became a symbol of intelligence. In the end, it was their stewards and librarians who

¹ Uzanne, *Zigzags d'un Curieux*. 41. ² Ib. 44. ³ 'The best, the most foolish woman in the world and the most useless to her husband.' ⁴ Op. cit. 41-2.

⁵ Ib. 35.

chose and cared for the books and their bindings, and it is to these anonymous but true lovers of books, therefore, that we should bring our homage and address our researches.¹ Nor can Uzanne imagine the noble ladies of those ages, in the great halls of Blois, of Fontainebleau, of Versailles, or of the Trianon, reading or caressing their books, consulting, adoring them, chirping a thousand loving tendernesses in their honour. He is sceptical because *les femmes bibliophiles* make him think of those stay-at-home gouty people who keep a pack of hounds without exercise in kennels of marble and porphyry: the poor dogs howl because they cannot give tongue in the forests or across the coves. So the soul of books must shrink in the company of high and mighty ladies who stamp them with their liveries without absorbing the ideas which are within them.²

II. WOMEN ARE JEALOUS OF BOOKS

No protestation, no persuasion, can divert this passion: it feeds on itself and satisfies itself. Age cannot stale nor familiarity spoil its infinite variety. *I can help the appreciation of them while I last*, Leigh Hunt³ said, *and love them till I die. Vestigia nulla retrorsum*, no going backwards, no more repentance than satiety: our studies are *bridal-chambers of the mind* where there is no *ennui*.⁴ Now if this passion of bibliophily can produce such effects, if it be pleasantly intended, what bitter torments shall it breed when it is opposed by another love with which it is suspected of competition, and if all be certain, as is credibly reported, that of women is predominant. If our business be

¹ Uzanne, *Ib.* 35-7. ² *Ib.* 38. ³ 'My Books', *Essays*. Camelot Ed. 303.

⁴ Richter, *Hesperus*.

interrupted, we may tolerate it; our bodies hurt, we can put up with it and be reconciled: but touch our books, even so much as cast a hint of scorn upon them, and we are most impatient, irritable, depressed; fair becomes foul, the Graces are turned to Harpies, friendly salutations to bitter imprecations, mutual feastings to plotting villainies, minings and counter-minings, good words to satires and invectives.

That all women oppose books in this way none would contend, for some few have been known to fall under the spell of bibliophily; and there are others, and they are of the more knowing sort, who are apt in the use of feminine witchery to lure their men from over-indulgence in the forbidden fruit of the book-shelves. Such a one was the pretty gay wife of the Rev. Mr. Grobe, who *liked to be merry in his study*, ‘*to make*’, she would say, ‘*those wicked old books ashamed of themselves for being so dry—and now I want them to see what a nice girl is made of*,’ and *she would raise her frock*, and stand and curtsey to Hooker’s *Ecclesiastical Polity*.¹ But women in themselves, says Jacob,² the curious French book-lover, make *l’Enfer des Bibliophiles*, a Hell for bibliophiles. That they oppose books, miscall, rail, and revile, bear them deadly hate and malice, is well known. Such an example we have in *Don Quixote* when the Knight’s niece and his housekeeper show a sharper inclination against the books of *chivalry*, which have unhinged the Don’s mind, than either the curate or the barber. So when men come to love books women are jealous of them, as they are jealous of anything which removes interest and attention from themselves. There is a significant and instinctive

¹ *Mr. Weston’s Good Wine*. T. F. Powys. 214. ² Qt. Uzanne, *Les Zigzags d’un Curieux*. 31.

enmity between women and books, *almost all women are the inveterate foes, not of novels, of course, nor peerages and popular volumes of history, but of books worthy the name; they detest the books which the collector desires and admires; they don't understand them, they are jealous of their mysterious charms*, and it is hard for them to see money spent on *a dingy old binding, or yellow paper scored with crabbed characters.*¹ So notable is this enmity that Octave Uzanne² gives out that even the most refined woman will look upon *l'affreux bouquin*³ as *un rival puissant, inexorable, si éminemment absorbant et fascinateur qu'elle le verra sans cesse se dresser comme une impénétrable muraille entre elle-même et l'homme à conquérir*: a powerful and inexorable rival, so absorbing and fascinating, that she sees it rise like a wall between herself and her man.

My lady oft-times chideth me
Because I love so much to be
Amid my honest folios.
'Thou lovest more to pore on those'—
In pretty scorn she sometime saith—
'Than on thy mistress' eyes, i' faith!'⁴

Comparisons are odious, so I do not parallel their jealousy with man's, for men and women are too subject to this infirmity. But surely it is more outrageous in women by reason of the weakness of their sex and the readiness with which they persuade themselves of neglect.

They see those seraglios of darling books increasing and multiplying both in number and in the affection which is bestowed upon them; petted and caressed; hugged, stroked,

¹ Lang, *Library*. 61. ² *Les Zigzags d'un Curieux*. 30. ³ 'The frightful old book.' ⁴ 'A Bookman's Complaint of his Lady.' Richard Le Gallienne, *Book-Song*. 72.

dainty little volumes snuggling (Newton¹ observes) into their husbands' or lovers' libraries, and they fret, fume and rage: they delight to *descend upon them*, in their husbands' absence, to *belabour and bang the dust out of them and flap them with dusters*, with that vindictiveness which, says Quiller-Couch,² is *the good housewife's right attitude towards literature*:

What woman would not angry be
 With man who turns from living charms
 To worship some dead beauty's arms?
 Why should he care of smiles to read
 When mine so sweet are his indeed:³

Our ancient and modern biographies afford us many examples. It is a wonder to read of that strange suspicion wherefore, as Richard de Bury⁴ maketh moan out of the mouths of the books in their own plaint, *this beast, ever jealous of our studies, and at all times implacable*, spies us out, and drawing her forehead into wrinkles, laughs us to scorn, abuses us in virulent speeches, points us out as the only superfluous furniture in the house; reckons us useless for any domestic economy, and argues to barter us away for costly head-dresses, cambric, silk, double-dyed purple stuffs, woollen, linen, furs, etc. She can in nowise understand why her bookman tarrieth in his study, why he

Prefers this 'den' to boudoir nest
 Where downy pillows coax to rest,

why dull calf more attracts than velvet sheen:

Vile musty books, in dead skins bound—
 Faugh, what an odour lingers round!⁵

¹ *Magnificent Farce*. 61. ² *From a Cornish Window*. 10. ³ 'The Young Wife's Plaint.' Anon. *Book-Song*. 166. ⁴ *Philobiblon*. 28. ⁵ 'The Young Wife's Plaint', *Book-Song*. 166.

That books are rivals, *thieves of love*, cannot be gainsaid: *beautiful books*, saith Octave Uzanne,¹ *have made as many conquests as beautiful women*. Byron was so bold as to confess to the Countess of Guiccioli that he was never long even in her society without *a yearning for the company of his utterly confused and tumbled-over library*.² Some would have it that book-love may be cured, or mitigated at least, by marriage; but there is no sovereign remedy against those jealousies, either before or after marriage, as I have sufficiently shown.

III. BOOK-LOVE CONTRA MATRIMONY

With what contempt does the bibliophile's wife utter the familiar gibe, *My husband! Oh, I see so little of him. He buries himself in his books!* Books encroach upon her rights, on her life, on the affection which is her due, and on the long hours which should be devoted to companionship. Those great, silent spirits make her anxious. They torment her. *She is jealous of them and gradually comes to hate them furiously with accumulated bitterness*,³ and she comes to regard a catalogue as *the most mischievous temptation* to her husband.⁴ Mistake me not in the meantime, or think that I do defend here any headstrong unruly flirtation with books. I do approve of what has been written touching those inordinate espousals of books, which are as malapert as any other mania or abandonment. Yet it is remiss of wives to exaggerate a normal reasonable passion into a monster of possession and absorption, which is too common among them, until envy undermines and jealousy

¹ *Book-Hunter in Paris*. 9. ² *Book-Lovers' Anth.* 198. ³ Uzanne, *Zigzags d'un Curieux*. 31. ⁴ Field, *Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac*. 211.

mars good matches. If all be truly reported, some few in every age have acted otherwise, here and there one; realising that *gravissimum est adamare nec potiri*,¹ 'tis a very grievous thing to love and not enjoy. The trouble is that they do not know where to stop: *Everywhere*, says the philosopher, *an insoluble problem—to know how much to be jealous.*² Bookmen may indeed, I deny not, marry if they will, they have free choice, but if they do they must be prepared to balance the budget of their affections with generosity and equity, when all may be well with them. Yet notwithstanding, so many are of the opposite part, that some warning is not out of place.

If all be true that I have read, the tyranny of the woman bibliophage is more common in France than in England. In modern French society, Uzanne confesses,³ *the mistress of the house is hostile to books*, she struggles against her husband's book-passion, first gently, *et presque câlinement*: wheedling, coaxing, and then finally, when these womanish measures fail, she comes *peu à peu*, bit by bit, to authority and despotism; raging and nagging. There is scarcely a bibliophile, he says,⁴ who has not had to fight day by day against the whims of his wife. But it would seem that their engagements are generally of the negative sort. They avoid dissensions, discussions, jeremiads, because they are *las de lutter pour la cause du livre*; and they find *les petits nerfs de Madame* less *résistants* than those of their folios and sixteenmos. No other peace for them, for even when it has been decreed that he may confer with his bookbinder as she with her dressmaker, she finds some way of wounding him with a thousand pinpricks,

¹ *Anacreon*. 29, 3-4. ² F. H. Bradley, *Aphorisms*. 93. ³ *Zigzags d'un Curieux*. 31. ⁴ *Ib.* 32-3.

which proves, he concludes, *surabondamment l'irrévérence absolue de la femme pour le livre*; and the last resort of these henpecked bookmen is to wear a pair of horns: *l'infortune époux bibliophile est gratifié de molièresques cornes de bouquin.*¹ It is a vulgar distinction, he admits, but it ensures tranquillity. The sum of it all is that, as he advises, women harbour a general hatred of books, understanding *aussi peu en tenir compte qu'un gentil singe d'un objet d'art,*² as little how to appreciate them as a pet monkey a work of art. I am well aware that there will be many of the more gallant sort of men who will combat this opinion, as Eugene Field, who knew a wife who *shared her husband's bibliophily,*³ and I could myself beat up some few exceptions to it, but they would be so interlarded with provisos and psychological gimcracks that I shall let them go, for it would be as easy to teach a cow to dance as even the average intelligent woman to love books as a man does. At the same time I would make it clear that I see no defect in this, but rather a difference. Book-love is as masculine (though not as common) as growing a beard. But I am too lavish of this subject.

Every bibliophile is notoriously handicapped in this business of domestic resistance. *Always it is open to him to burn or sell, or, at least to criticise his books*, Garrod relates,⁴ but, he well adds, *an unsatisfactory wife can be neither burnt nor sold—and it is not often that she will allow herself to be criticised*. In all such differences the sense of humour is a powerful ally. *O viveret Democritus!*⁵ Happy are those bibliophiles who can counter feminine attacks with a joke, as some have done with notable

¹ *Zigzags d'un Curieux.* 31. ² *Ib.* 33. ³ *Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac.* 141.

⁴ *Profession of Poetry.* 254. ⁵ 'O that Democritus were alive again!'

success. I can, perhaps, give instance of the story of the Professor of Sauves¹ who spent five hours a day and more in his study, but one day being late for dinner, which was not usually his habit, his wife entered his study, and finding him still reading, said: '*I wish, my dear, I was a book.*' '*Why?*' asked the Professor. '*Because you would then be constant to me.*' '*I should have no objection, if you were an almanack,*' he replied. '*Why an almanack?*' she asked. '*Because,*' said he, '*I should have a new one every year!*' But there be too few of them of this light humour, and the days of convenient metempsychosis are gone with that Golden Age when men and gods were on familiar terms and women might have translated themselves into books for the delight of their bibliophilic lords, as

Daphne, eluding Phoebus' flame,
Remained the laurel she became;
For poets, observation proves,
Prefer their laurels to their loves.²

There are gentle bookmen who have wished as much, and Eugene Field reports³ that his friend, Judge Methuen, believed that in this life woman served but *a probationary period for sins of omission or of commission in a previous existence*, and that her next step upwards was a period in which her soul entered into a book to be petted, fondled, beloved and cherished by some good man. It was a pretty and a kindly idea, and the more to be commended inasmuch as the Judge himself was the victim of a jealous wife who, finding him *on two successive afternoons sitting alone in the library with Pliny in his lap*, snatched the offending book from her husband's embraces, and locked it up

¹ *Dict. of Anec.* (1809.) i, 197. ²Richard Garnett, *Idylls and Epigrams*. 56.

³ *Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac*. 20.

in the pantry, refusing to be comforted until the good Judge promised to be *more circumspect in the future.*¹

Many good bibliophiles look upon wives as necessary evils, and to their own ends make use of them for domestic purposes and to have issue. Such will agree with Octave Uzanne² when he prescribes that *les vrais bibliophiles, même mariés, doivent devenir célibataires en franchissant le seuil de leur bibliothèque*, true bibliophiles, even when married, should be celibates when they cross the threshold of their library, for *la passion bouquinière n'admet pas le partage*, book-passion cannot be shared, it is a retreat, a final refuge from the jolts of worldly affairs. Every private history will yield a number of examples. There is, perhaps, a correspondence here with the old wish that procreation, as we have always known it, should be superseded by some intellectual process which might not only satisfy the nice longings which promote such ideas, but which might augment our natural powers. Remy de Gourmont goes further when he imagines *a certain correlation between complete and profound copulation and the development of the brain: il y aurait peut-être une certaine corrélation entre la copulation complète et profonde et le développement cérébral.*³ There are many differences of opinion upon this mystery of procreation, but in all times there have been those who would desensualise the business, make it spiritual, intellectual, anything but what it is, as Montaigne,⁴ who wist not well whether he *should not rather desire to beget and produce a perfectly-well-shaped, and excellently-qualitied infant, by the acquaintance of the*

¹ *Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac.* 230. ² *Les Zigzags d'un Curieux.* 34.

³ *Natural Philosophy of Love.* Trans. Ezra Pound. 75. ⁴ *Essays.* Ed. Seccombe. ii, 103.

Muses, than by the copulation of his wife; and he contends that there are few men given to *Poesie* that would not esteem it a far greater honour to be the fathers of the *Aeneid* than of the *goodliest boy in Rome*; that would not rather endure the loss of the one than the perishing of the other; for, according to Aristotle, of all workmen, the Poet is the most amorous of his productions and conceited of his labours. Some bibliophiles find in books the proxies of generation: books are their adopted children. One such is recorded by Oliver Wendell Holmes: *I adopt, he confesses, a certain number of books every year, out of a love for the foundlings and stray children of other people's brains that nobody seems to care for.*¹ Many of them are so precise that they are averse at all times from all womenfolk, wives or others, coming near to their books. They suspect them and their dusters, their spring cleanings and other domestic upheavals, which vex the peace and endanger the beauty of books. Books alone allure and enamour them; they behold and love a library as the most amiable and fairest object, their *summum bonum*, or chiefest good:

On those dark shelves no housewife hand profanes,
O'er his mute files the monarch folio reigns.²

IV. HENPECKED BOOKMEN

No let or hindrance is strict enough to stay a man's book-passion, so that opposition only encourages him to dissemble

¹ *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table.* (1902.) 210. ² O. W. Holmes, 'The Study', *Poems*. The bibliophile from Durandal, in Bonnardot's *Mirror of the Parisian Bibliophile*, was more cautious, for he 'would never have thought of marrying Venus herself without a sufficient dowry of books'. Trans. Koch. 31.

his love by cunning, counterfeit, and craft. It is a deplorable condition, this, which drives a bibliophile to pitiful shifts in seeking to avoid opposition, for he is not to be checked or more than superficially dismayed by the jealousy of the womenfolk: he would leave wife and home when these differences of affection cannot be reconciled. One such in mine own experience: *no more books*, decreed his wife, *no more wife*, he said, and left her. But most of them find cunning a principal and infallible remedy. They can best promote their passion when their actions are most sly and secret, and of this craftiness the last refuge and surest, to be put in practice in the utmost place, when no other means will take effect, is smuggling: *history speaks of husbands who have had to practise the guile of smugglers when they conveyed a new purchase across their frontier.*¹ Every wedded bibliophile² who would escape the jealous protestations of his spouse must become a smuggler perforce. It is the advice which every bookman in this case brings to his cronies, and 'tis easy, for few women can distinguish one book from another. All *Civil War Tracts* are alike, one to another, mere pamphlets, and dirty, as like as not, to boot. *First Editions* are just books, no difference between a *First Folio Shakespeare* and the *Family Bible*. *Bindings* are

¹ Lang, *Library*. 61. ² The wedded bibliophile is not, of course, the only sufferer from these anti-bookish prejudices. I find evidence of this in a letter to T. S. Eliot from C. K. Scott Moncrieff as he lay dying in a Roman hospital, where, he confesses, he could have 'gathered a fair-sized library around him' had it not been for the 'disapproving eye of a Sister, who thinks reading foolish' and 'books untidy'. Nevertheless, being a determined bookman, he *cunningly* devised a method by which volumes 'come and go by stealth, swaddled in cast-off pyjamas'. *Memories and Letters*. (1931.) 194.

either pretty or ugly. A modern *presentation* volume of the *gin-palace* kind (as Lawrence of Arabia named it to George Sutcliffe, the binder) better than all the tarnished splendour of Grolier or Le Gascon, Mearne or Roger Payne. The subterfuges of the henpecked bibliophile are thus made easier, for the arrival of a new book is like to be overlooked once it is safely conveyed to its shelf.

Thus the bibliophile *hides his purchases like a vice, dissembles his desires, and it is cunningly, like a smuggler, that he takes up by the back stairs his new books, insinuating them into his home furtively and by stealth*,¹ as that greengrocer of Pimlico, Mr. W. T. Pevier, the most *devoted* of collectors Spencer of Oxford Street ever knew, who smuggled his new purchases into his shop with the connivance of Mr. Spencer's brother, who carried them from the bookshop, entering the shop after a signal had been given and handing the package stealthily to Mr. Pevier, who buried it among the potatoes until Mrs. Pevier was absent, when he would exhume his treasures and transfer them in triumph to his shelves. On one occasion he bought the four large *extra* plates to *Pickwick*. Their size (18 by 12 inches) presented difficulties to the smuggler, but love laughs at more than locksmiths, and he conceived the ingenious device of having them strapped to his back under his coat, and so *went off home, marching as bold as brass over the threshold into the potato store*.² And Spencer gives a further example, that of Dr. Tweed, of Dorset Square, who *found it necessary to leave his parcels of books with the baker at the corner, smuggling them in later when his wife was not looking*. Such

¹ Uzanne, *Les Zigzags d'un Curieux*. 32. ² Spencer, *Forty Years in My Bookshop*. 96-7.

another story we find in *Birkbeck Hill*¹ of a working-man bibliophile who so feared his wife's reproaches that he smuggled his new purchases at the bottom of a basket in which he brought home the week's supply of potatoes; and to make an end of these sorry tales, Rogers Rees has a record of an impecunious fellow who sacrificed his wife's comforts on the altar of books, so that each new purchase had to be smuggled across the domestic frontier like contraband of war, which indeed it was. His method was to lay the parcel outside the window *at a point where the folds of the curtains hid it from the view of anyone within the room*, to be slyly brought to port when the coast was clear.²

Where none of these remedies is used, they patch up their differences. Some others, and they perchance have the best of it, contrive to love both books and wife:

The fairest Garden in her Looks,
And in her Mind the Wisest Books.³

I may cite Mr. Samuel Pepys, who established a nice parity between his enthusiasm for books and women, for though he provoked his wife's jealousy by the more flagrant of his infidelities, he had not to combat any opposition to his books. In proof of it there remains for evidence his brag to Sir William Coventry that in the event of a further Dutch war they would have to find another Clerk of the Acts, and he thanked God that he had saved enough money to buy himself *a good book and good fiddle*, and that he already *had a good wife*. Sir William merrily replied: *Why, I have enough to buy me a good book, and I shall not need a fiddle, because I have never a one of your good*

¹ *Talks about Autographs*. 5. ² *The Pleasures of a Bookworm*. 27. ³ Cowley 'The Garden', *Essays*.

wives.¹ Happier still was Pliny, whose wife's love of books grew out of her fondness for him. *She keeps my books by her*, he writes,² *loves to read them, learns them by heart*; and in his absence the books took his place: *she put them where he ought to be.*³ Which every good bookman will approve. And few would disapprove of Eugene Field's contrivance whereby, although he stiffly holds the love of books to be better than the love of women, he takes pleasure in *associating this precious volume or that with one woman or another whose friendship coincided with the reading and loving of the book.*⁴

Whether or not there be a true compact between them depends upon the quality of the love they own:

There's a lady for my humour!
A pretty book of flesh and blood, and well
Bound up, in a fair letter too. Would I
Had her, with all the Errata.⁵

It is a pretty compromise, and a bookman's fancy, otherwise it would not have been so phrased. But it is not so easily performed, for *wanton dalliance with a paramour*⁶ may be no more than the recreation of a bibliophile, his true love is ever his book, and he is not easily persuaded to leave his

studious native heights untrod
For that low soil,
Where momentary blossoms deck the sod,⁷

to sport with Amaryllis in the shade, unless he takes a book with him and cons it with her, if she will allow him.

Yea, but, thou repliest, what if she will not? And there, if I may say so, you have me at a disadvantage, for I am not

¹ Diary. Pepys. 18:ii:1667-8. ² Epist. iv, 19. ³ Ib. vi, 7. ⁴ Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac. 19. ⁵ J. Shirley, *The Cardinal*. ⁶ Henry VI, Pt. I, v, 1. ⁷ John Addington Symonds.

skilled in these complexities. Thus far I have discoursed myself, and having come thus far I know not how to get back, and yet I must and will say something more, add a word or two, if only as a hint to those who follow me in such mazes, for *my profession is not to know the truth nor to attain it. I rather open than discover things.*¹ Let us see, then, whether we may have a little more insight into the knowledge of this problem. To this inquiry it is necessary to premise that for each case there is a different treatment:

There be triple ways to take, of the eagle or the snake,
Or the way of a man with a maid.²

The handling of women, in the matter of books (as of other things) is still an art, as it was of old, and there is no golden rule: *Art happens.*³ It is *sauve qui peut*, so let every man follow his own free will, and do as he sees cause. Some are willing to endure any misery, so they may but enjoy their dear books; but that, in the common saying, is a poor show. Some prescribe the tactics of Petruchio, but everyone can tame a shrew save him that hath her. Others grin and abide, as they say in Lancashire, making the best of both worlds in an ironic tolerance, as the poet advises:⁴

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes;

and still others, for want of courage or of a better intelligence, make the best of a bad job by dissembling and cunning, as I have shown, and finally are those who, abandoning hope in

¹ Montaigne, *Essays*. Ed. Seccombe. Bk. II, 2. ² Kipling, *Barrack-Room Ballads*. 205. ³ Whistler, *Ten O'Clock*. (1888.) 21. ⁴ Keats, *Ode to Melancholy*.

this life, anticipate a heaven to come where there are no women who, *wanting victuals, make a fuss if we buy books instead.*¹ For myself I could willingly wink at a lady's faults, but that I am bound by the laws of this treatise to attempt to solve my problems, not to dodge them; and it is no nearer a solution to admit that there are faults on both sides, as I know there are. Many probable arguments they have to prove the necessity of tolerance in such cases, and without question they are not to be contradicted, only that when jealousy comes in at the door tolerance flies out of the window, and it is easier to slay love than jealousy, so *hic labor, hoc opus est,*² this cannot conveniently be done, by reason of many and several impediments. If such objects were removed, no doubt both parties might easily be satisfied in a fair and companionable arrangement; but if I acknowledge that of Seneca to be true, *nullius boni sine socio jucunda possessio est,*³ there is no sweet content in the possession of any good thing unless shared with companions, I know also that there can be no companionship where there is competition. It is in vain to seek remedies, for book-jealousy is an inbred infirmity, a disease of love, so make the best of it, *ut vulnus insanabile, sic vulnus insensibile;* as it is incurable, so it is insensible. The best remedy, then, for him who would have both books and a wife, and for her who would marry a bibliophile, if the fair means of companionship will not take place, is to dissemble it; or to declare a pragmatic sanction, agree to differ, shut one eye (in the vulgar phrase), smile, turn it off with a jest. Peace may never be declared, but an armistice puts off many gross inconveniences.

¹ Eugene Field, qt. Pref., *Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac.* vii. ² Virgil, *Aen.* vi, 129. ³ *Epistle.* 6.

V. A DIGRESSION OF WOMEN READERS

Of these adventures and exercises and recreations among books, many, as I have tried to make plain, properly belong to men, but at all times, as I shall now show, women have followed them close, for in reading, as in other recreations, they are not to be gainsaid, and with good reason, for what more opportune to their wonted seclusions and limitations (especially in times past), their reveries, meditations and introspections, which often for them are substitutes for more active life, nay, life itself, than the tender and beneficent intermedia-tion of books? Thus in all ages have they read and studied not so much to inform their minds (though that was ever their advice to themselves) as to fill or kill the time, cram the vacuities between more passionate moments; to stake out a claim in masculine activities, or link, chain, tie themselves in this wise, or to console themselves in those gaps and deso-lations when the man has departed:

Now deep in Taylor and the Book of Martyrs,
Now drinking Citron with his Grace and Chartres.¹

How far these perturbations and delinquencies pervade it would be hard to tell. Yet they have been observed in several periods, and many opinions as a result of such observations are recorded by trustworthy witnesses. I may recall from among them some references to Christina, Queen of Sweden, made by Huet in his autobiography. This queen ever made a forward virtue of learning, and would entice to her court at Stockholm savants and scholars from distant cities: thus came Descartes, Saumaise, Isaac Vossius (who became her guide in

¹ Pope, *Moral Essays.* ii, 63-4.

Greek), Bochart, Peter Daniel Huet, and many others to a land which was then considered barbarous. Christina *did not suffer a day to pass without devoting some of her best hours to reading with Vossius, in which she engaged so eagerly as to neglect the usual time for repose.*¹ The question which insinuates itself is whether or no Christina was suffering from *Prossy's complaint.*² Such a conclusion might be inferred from Bishop Huet's account of her behaviour, for she was notoriously capricious and willing to be swayed this way or that way by her latest masculine enthusiasm. Thus, *when during her passion for letters she had resigned herself to the tutelage of Saumaise or Vossius, she conformed implicitly to their judgments;*³ and after *she had thrown herself into a state of languor by her intense application to those studies, and, later, fallen under the influence of a French physician, called Bourdelot, she was equally willing for him to remove all books from her sight and to believe that a learned woman was regarded in a ridiculous light by the elegant ladies of the French court.* This ruse of the crafty doctor was successful, *and as he besides amused her with his pleasantries and jocularity, he gained so great an ascendancy over her youthful mind, that she began to lose all relish for serious learning, her flexible and*

¹ Huet, *Memoirs*. Trans. Aikin. i, 119. ² MORELL. Prossy's complaint! What do you mean, Candida? CANDIDA. Yes, Prossy, and all the other secretaries you ever had. Why does Prossy condescend to wash up the things, and to peel potatoes and abase herself in all manner of ways for six shillings a week less than she used to get in a city office? She's in love with you, James: that's the reason. They're all in love with you. And you are in love with preaching because you do it so beautifully. And you think it's all enthusiasm for the kingdom of Heaven on earth; and so do they. You dear silly! 'Candida', *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*. Bernard Shaw. ii, 122.

³ Huet, *Op. cit.* i, 150.

wavering disposition being such that *she entirely depended upon the opinions of others, especially of those who had acquired her esteem by any species of merit; and from this period, says Huet, she gave so much credit to this buffoon, that she almost repented of having learned anything.*¹ Christina's love of learning was but a phase of her love of love, and whatever her apparent pursuit had been she would have abandoned it for her main purpose. Even social successes lose their attraction once love is achieved. Mlle de Lespinasse told her lover, the Comte de Guibert, that from the moment she loved she felt a disgust for such successes. *What need have we of pleasing when we are beloved?* She asked: *Is there one emotion, one desire left that has not for its object the person whom we love and for whom we desire to live exclusively?*²

I know that this notion will be contested by some members of both sexes, and I shall be told not to generalise about women, even from more particulars than I have summoned up, yet I shall let it stay as a legitimate bone of contention, for, say what you will, those who provide us with arguments are also benefactors. *A good fight justifies any cause.*³ Neither am I blind to the fact that there have been, and still are, great women readers, even though I hedge the observation about with buts. But, whether confessed or not, the majority of women find books no more than stop-gaps, as Mary Coleridge her diary; if she dies or gets married, she says, *the work will be discontinued, for, no one writes diaries in Paradise.*⁴

If this is not a sufficient proof, add to it the story of Madame

¹ Huet, *Ib. i.* 148–50. ² Letters of Mlle de Lespinasse. Trans. Wormeley. 158. ³ Nietzsche. ⁴ Gathered Leaves. 24.

de Charrière.¹ When the door was closed against Benjamin Constant, *she who had always been lonely saw herself, at last, alone, seeming to those around her like one moving in an empty room*; so back to her books and her writing, playing *Providence to the obscure folk who had drifted to Colombier as the stray leaves drifted from the courtyard*; for the most part they were women, often lonely as herself: Henrietta L'Hardy, *handsome as a Van Dyk, on whom Monsieur de Charrière from behind his folio of mathematics would sometimes covetously peer*, Isabella de Gélien, *a romantic dark-eyed beauty of peasant stock with a gift for poetry*, Marianne Ustrich, an Austrian girl abandoned by her parents, discovered in a forest tending a herd of goats and reading the *Télémaque* of Fénelon, and Henriette Monachan, with whom she read Locke: *But the fancies of Henriette, while her brows were knit over 'The Human Understanding', strayed elsewhere; they were in the stables with Racine, Monsieur de Charrière's handsome coachman. For Racine had seduced her, and Henriette for the second time was about to scandalize the Canton of Vaud with an illegitimate baby.*²

Many authorities believe that women read with less method than men. *Except some professed scholars*, Gibbon asserts,³ *women in general read much more than men, but, for want of a plan, a method, a fixed object, their reading is of little benefit to themselves, or others*. Others think they are less inclined to adventure among the drier sort of document: *It is so rare*, said Lord Rosmead, *to find a lady who is as much at home in a Blue-book as in a drawing-room.*⁴ Some, Addison among them, believe that they read for show, as that lady whose books,

¹ *The Portrait of Zélide*. Geoffrey Scott. 190-1. ² *Ib.* 199. ³ *Memoirs*.

⁴ *The Times*. 28:i:1929.

most of them, were got together either because she had heard them praised, or because she had seen the authors of them.¹ The first of these reasons is not in our time peculiar to women, and the second has often a negative effect, for I hear it said that to see authors is to reduce inclination for their books. Authors should be read and not seen. But there was something *feminine* in the ordering and arrangement of this lady's library where, at the end of the folios (which were finely bound and gilt) were great jars of china placed one above another in a very noble piece of architecture, the quartos separated from the octavos by a pile of smaller vessels, which rose in a delightful pyramid; the octavos bounded by tea-dishes of all shapes, colours, and sizes, so disposed on a wooden frame, that they looked like one continued pillar indented with the finest strokes of sculpture, and stained with the greatest variety of dyes; and so he proceeds, showing how books were but part of a decorative scheme made up of architecture, paintings, ornaments; scaramouches, lions, monkeys, mandarins, trees, shells, and a thousand other odd figures in china ware.²

In a subsequent paper³ he gives a catalogue of the sort of books his men readers think women should read. It is written in the elegantly contemptuous manner of that day, and concludes with a recital from letters he had received from women readers inviting the inclusion of favourite tomes in his hypothetical library for a lady. One is for *Pharamond*, to be followed by *Cassandra*; Coquetilla begs him *not to think of nailing women upon their knees with manuals of devotion, nor of scorching their faces with books of housewifery*; Florella desires books *written against prudes*. Plays of all sorts have their advocates:

¹ *Spectator*. 37. ² *Ib.* ³ *Ib.* 92.

All for Love is mentioned in some fifteen letters, *Sophonisba*, or *Hannibal's Overthrow*, in a dozen, *The Innocent Adultery* is highly approved of, so also *Mithridates*, *King of Pontus*, and *Alexander the Great*; the *Aurengzebe* has supporters, but *Theodosius*, or *The Force of Love*, carries it from all the rest. William Law, in his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*,¹ has no great opinion of the women readers of his time: *Flavia buys all books of wit and humour, and has made an expensive collection of all our English poets*; which in our day would not be accounted sinful; but she only sometimes reads *a book of piety*, and then only if it be short and *commended for its style and language, and she can tell where to borrow it*. Methinks there would be fewer readers of even our Dean of St. Paul's (men as well as women) if such rules did not still govern our ordinary book-folk. But, doubtless, they were hitting at their Lydia Languishes, who are not of a day but for all time, although in our later times they would not trouble to hide *Peregrine Pickle*, *Roderick Random*, and *The Sentimental Journey*, or anything half as good, if they had it, behind *The Whole Duty of Man* and Fordyce's *Sermons*. So for the rest I stiffly maintain that at their best women read as finely as men, if not always, or even often, for the same reasons.

But to make a plain and full answer we need go no further than some of those memoirs in which they have recorded their adventures among books, or those others in which fair-minded men have awarded them full honours in this respect. Notable among those men is Roger Ascham in his treatise of *The Schoolmaster*, where he upholds the wisdom of kindness in the instruction of youth, *for, beate a child, if he daunce not*

¹ Ch. vii.

*well, and cherish him, though he learne not well, ye shall have him unwilling to go to daunce, and glad to go to his booke;*¹ and immediately annexed to this passage is the instance of Lady Jane Grey, a devoted lover of books from a tender age, to which passion she was inspired by the kindly teaching of John Elmer, whose excellence in this kind shone out because of the dull severity of her parents; but you shall have the story as he relates it himself: *Before I went into Germanie, I came to Brodegate in Lecetershire, to take my leave of that noble Ladie Jane Grey, to whom I was exceeding moch beholdinge. Her parentes, the Duke and the Duches, with all the household, Gentlemen and Gentle-women, were huntinge in the Parke: I found her, in her Chamber, readinge 'Phaedon Platonis' in Greeke, and that with as moch delite, as some gentleman would read a merie tale in 'Bocase'. After salutation, and dewtie done, with som other taulke, I asked her, whie she wold leese soch pastime in the Parke? Smiling she answered me; I wisse, all their sporte in the Parke is but a shadoe to that pleasure, that I find in 'Plato': Alas good folke, they never felt, what trewe pleasure ment.* She goes on to tell him, in answer to his questions, how she acquired this taste from *M. Elmer*, who teacheth me so jentlie, so pleasantlie, with soch faire allurements to learning, and she thinks all the tyme nothing while she is with him;² but this is not to my theme, suffice it that in one instance, and there are more of like kind, a young and high-born woman preferred reading to hunting, being moved to do so by the kindness of a man. In order to show that we have no patent in such enthusiasms, I may mention an instance out of *Huet* which proves that women in France at a time when, as I have shown, learning was considered

¹ *The Schoolmaster.* Ed. Mayor. 30. ² *Ib.* 33-4.

unladylike and inelegant, surreptitiously courted the classics. On one of his periodical visits to Bourbon, where he went to take the waters, Huet met Mary Elizabeth de Rochechouart, *an elegant and modest young lady*, whom he afterwards celebrated in verse. She was with her aunt, the Abbess of Fontevraud, and one day when all the rest of the young people were playing games, the good Bishop was pleased to discover his new acquaintance hidden *in a corner of a private closet*, attentively reading a book, which she attempted to conceal. With much reluctance and many blushes she at length submitted to Huet's request, and produced a book containing some of the smaller works of Plato. She implored him to keep the thing a secret, and, since chance had brought him thither, to read over with her from beginning to end the *Crito*, of which she had made a commencement. This was done, whilst all the time Huet remained fixed in astonishment, at the discovery of so much erudition, with so much modesty, in one of her tender sex and age.¹

Lady Mary Montagu, a great and lively reader at all times, carefully cherished her love of reading, and she longed for relays of eyes like the hiring of post-horses, so that she could indulge her passion still further: she longs to continue it to valuable books, but these are almost as rare as valuable men, so must needs be content with what she finds. She keeps abreast of the books of the day, which when she is abroad, as she mostly is, are supplied to her by her daughter. One of them is *Pamela*, whose extraordinary success she thinks undeserved: it has been translated into French and into Italian; it was all the fashion at Paris and Versailles, and, she adds maliciously, is still the joy of the chambermaids of all nations.² Henry Fielding

¹ Huet, *Memoirs*. Trans. Aikin. ii, 346-7. ² Letters. (Everyman Ed.) 392.

is more to her liking, but she prefers *Joseph Andrews* to his *Foundling*. The night the books arrived she had been out riding in the moonlight; arriving back at ten, she opened the box and, falling upon *Fielding's works*, was fool enough to sit up all night reading;¹ she is not averse from asking her daughter to send her books named in the newspapers, which no doubt for the greater part will be trash, lumber, etc., but will serve to pass the idle time: the *Fortunate Mistress*, *Accomplished Rake*, *Mrs. Charke's Memoirs*, *Modern Lovers*, *History of Two Orphans*, *Memoirs of David Ranger*, *Miss Mostyn*, *Dick Hazard*, *History of a Lady Platonist*, *Sophia Shakespear*, *Jasper Banks*, *Frank Hammond*, *Sir Andrew Thompson*, *Van a Clergyman's Son*, *Cleanthes and Celimena*.²

That other great reader among eighteenth-century women, Mrs. Piozzi, brought up as she was in the Johnsonian school, rails against the popular novel: *Have you read all these new Romances?* she asks Penelope Pennington:³ *The Knights of the Swan*, *the terrific Leonore*, *and a Ballad of Alonzo the Brave*? And noting a great change in *popular reading*, she supposes people grow *tired of Master Jacky and Miss Jenny*, and *fly from insipid diet of water-gruel and chicken broth to Caviare and Cayenne, and Peppermint water*, concluding that it is wholesomer to study stories of little *Eugenia tumbling off the plank*, *out from old simple Sir Hugh's arms, than following the frightful Monk to his precipice*. She is no more easily satisfied even when Holcroft's *Paris* and Miss Edgeworth's *Popular Tales* are the only books *found in windows, on toilettes, etc.*⁴

Lady Louisa Stuart dipped into Mrs. Opie's Tales, but could not *labour through them*; Law's *Memorials* she found just

¹ Letters. (Everyman Ed.) 380. ² Ib. 477. ³ Intimate Letters. 140. ⁴ Ib. 267.

worth turning over to convince one that such things once were (witches, tortures, etc.), and to show that there was little to choose between those religious parties *so far as persecution and cruelty went*;¹ the Blue-Stocking, Elizabeth Carter, found the much abused and ridiculed *Pleasures of Melancholy* a most charming sombre piece; the admirable Miss Eden read Boswell's '*Life of Johnson*', the '*Mémoires du Cardinal Retz*', *Shakespeare*, and she knew a great part of the '*Bible*' almost by heart before she was eleven, and she never lost this taste for books;² and what shall one say of that young girl, Emily Shore, who records³ (3:vii:1838) such diverse studies as Massinger's *Emperor of the East*, Foster's *Essays*, the *Natural History of Enthusiasm*, Butler's *Analogy*, into which she dived; the *History of India* and Mrs. Somerville's *Connection, on alternate days*? She determines to keep up her French with *Lamartine*, her Latin with the *Aeneid*, her Greek with the *Medea*, and, still unsatisfied, sighs to emulate her sisters, who are reading German and Spanish.

Even great queens have been readers, as Margaret de Valois, a most learned lady as well as a collector of exquisite books; no branch of science, sacred or profane, came amiss to the '*Reine Margot*'. She may be regarded as the Queen of the '*Femmes Bibliophiles*' of the Court of France.⁴ Catherine II of Russia read much, and the books she read tell of her masculine intellect; *Tacitus* and *Montesquieu*, the *Annals* of *Baronius*, *Bayle*, the *Encyclopédie*, and *Voltaire*, were among her favourites, and *Voltaire* she acclaimed as her master: *He, or rather his works, formed my intellect and my judgment. I am his pupil*; as she grew older she

¹ *Letters*. i, 200. ² *Miss Eden's Letters*. Intro. ix. ³ *Journal*. 228–9. ⁴ Elton, *Great Book-Collectors*. 108.

continued to be a great reader, although *she remained uneducated in a real sense* (whatever that may mean); among the authors she either read or skimmed were *Rabelais, Corneille, Molière, Le Sage, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Gibbon, Fielding, Richardson, and Sterne*; she considered that *l'Esprit des Lois* should be *the breviary of every sovereign of common sense*, and whilst she was *inseparable from Blackstone's Commentaries*, she took care to do none of the things in his book.¹ Queen Elizabeth, in Francis Bacon's opinion,² was endued with learning in her sex singular, and rare even among masculine princes; unto the very last year of her life, saith mine author, she was accustomed to appoint set hours for reading, scarcely any young student in a university more daily or more duly. By all these it plainly appears that whatever I have said about their bibliophily, women, when they are so disposed, can read as valiantly as men.

PART VII

REMEDIES CONSIDERED

I. THE BIBLIOPHOBE MALGRÉ LUI

In the next place we must consider in a brief parenthesis how some good bookmen have been forced into occasional fear of books by the menace of their continuous multiplication accelerated by the economic needs or vanities of superfluous authors or the enterprise of meretricious publishers:

The loaded Press beneath her labour groans,
And Printer's devils shake their weary bones.¹

No end to the multiplication of books: even bibliophiles are scared. *There are men, says Cervantes, who will make you books and turn them loose in the world with as much dispatch as they would do a dish of fritters.*² Whether or not such irresponsible production should be controlled I shall discuss anon, in the meantime it is necessary to bring some evidence in support of my belief, not only that bibliophiles are depressed by the over-production of books, for they can never read or even cursorily examine a fraction of them, but that the most devout readers are not always reading or always in the humour for reading. *There are times, says Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, in which every active mind feels itself above any and all human books.*³ There was once a friend of his, *a gentleman, singularly free from*

¹ Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.* 119–20. ² *Don Quixote.*

³ *Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table.* (1902.) 128.]

affectations,—not learned, but of perfect breeding, which is often so much better than learning, who sweetly and honestly said to him one day: *I hate books*; and the good doctor thinks there are a great many gentlemen and others, who read with a mark to keep their place, that really ‘*hate books*’, but never had the wit to find it out, or the manliness to own it.¹ There are times when he feels like that friend, when, he frankly confesses, *I hate the very sight of a book*; the reason being a physical necessity to talk out what is in the mind, before putting anything else into it.² If all of us were as honest as this witness, we should be compelled, peradventure, to a like admission, and with no disgrace or harm done to either books or ourselves, for as I have shown in my treatise of the *Bibliophagi*,³ repletion follows a repast of books, which, if satiety is to be brief, must be cured by proper expulsion, and, finally, in this matter of temporary indifference or even revulsion, I have not yet claimed that books are invincible specifics against all emotional disaffections or conditions of intellectual stasis or spiritual dilemma.

It is now time to take this account of temporary and sometimes justifiable bibliophobia a step further towards those instances of fear of books in masses. Many a bewildered bibliophile suffers unnamed terrors at the thought of an uncontrolled mob of books. *Books oppress him and he is more bent on finding reasons for not reading than for reading.*⁴ Librarians and book-sellers are often afflicted; and all professional book-reviewers are possible bibliophobes, sometimes because they are forced by their trade to devour more books than is good for them;

¹ *Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*. (1902.) 57. ² *Ib.* 129. ³ *Anatomy of Bibliomania*. i, 187–207. ⁴ Anon., ‘The Burden of Books’, *Saturday Review*. 3:xii:1906.

others have been turned into reviewers of books because they have failed at writing them, and thus relieve their ingrowing resentment by mean condemnations and niggard praises of more fortunate writers; others, again, are jealous by nature, and cannot resist a fling at a brother of the craft: *critics, like the rest of mankind*, said Dr. Johnson, *are very frequently misled by interest*;¹ they had as lief kick a good book as pat a bad one, and damn with faint praise or exalt with shallow gusto, as with mutual compliments they acclaim and claw one another. But apart from these defects, the very bulk of books alarms them. One feels the *symptoms of bibliophobia* when he contemplates the seasonal spate of new books flowing from the publishers' offices; he would that *there were fewer books in the world, and could easily be content with a library of a few hundred*; but this, he admits, is the expression only of a mood—the mood of bibliophobia in which he resents the existence of far more books than he has time to read and the consequent necessity of spending on the second-best books a great deal of time that might be spent in reading the best.² Another holds that most of us are beginning to contemplate with genuine horror the enormous remorseless stream of literary matter that pours from our printing presses and threatens to swamp us in its mighty tide:³

Another Epic! who inflicts again
More books of blank upon the sons of men!⁴

In every age *the accumulation of books has been regarded with some degree of jealousy—the inundation of paper and print seems to have been thought as formidable as the ideas of men, as an*

¹ *Rambler*, 93. ² Y. Y., 'Bibliophobia', *New Statesman*. 29:x:1928. ³ A. L. Maycock, 'Bibliophobia', *Blackwood's Magazine*. Oct. 1929. ⁴ Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. 379–80.

*inundation of water to their houses and cattle.*¹ Every kind of reader has expressed discontent with this onrush, and all manner of condemnations have been uttered, from honest concern at the possible loss of good books in this avalanche of publications to morbid fear and fanatic hatred. I doubt not that the first protest came from the wisest of men when he sighed that *of making many books there is no end,*² and, could a record be gathered up, every age would add to the catalogue of protestants. I shall not attempt it, but after my manner I shall assemble a few for your better content, for it is no light matter when so many wiseacres announce that the *cacöethes scribendi* or, rather, *cacöethes imprimendi*, is *regularly set down as a disease, as urgently demanding medical aid as a disorder of the frame, a typhus, or a dropsy.*³ But I shall not go back to ancient times for my instances, as well I might,⁴ for in the human adventure, one age is as good as another when seeking examples to illustrate the behaviour of our species when sprung into action, physical or mental, by identical conditions. I see little change and few essential variations. *In 1632, just as now, people,* says Masson, *complained of a plethora of books;*⁵ *Good God!* cried George Wither, *how many dungboats full of fruitless words do they yearly foist on his Majesty's subjects!*⁶ Sir Thomas Browne, as I have cited elsewhere, was of the same opinion, and far from joining those who deplored *the combustion of the Library of Alexandria*, he thought there were too many books in the world and could with patience behold the destruction

¹ Intro., *Retrospective Review.* (1820.) i, 1. ² Ecclesiastes xii, 12. ³ Intro., *Retrospective Review.* (1820.) i, 1. ⁴ 'The writers of satire, ever since the times of Horace and Juvenal, have been exclaiming that all the world were scribbling.' *Ib.* i, 1-2. ⁵ Milton. (1858.) i, 150. ⁶ *The Scholar's Purgatory.*

of many of them.¹ His imprecation echoes through the centuries, increasing in volume as it reaches times present, where it takes form as a professional fear of indiscriminate reading. I have already enlarged upon one phase of these objections,² so will here confine myself to those aspects which spring from fear of general consequences.

As long ago as the year 1820 learned and good people were scared out of their wits by the rapid spread of education and the opportunity of wide reading then being given to the uncultured classes. Never, says the Editor of the *Retrospective Review*,³ was education so common as at present—never were books so commonly dispersed, so multifariously read. We present, he continues, a spectacle of what, perhaps, was never before seen in any age, certainly neither Greek nor Roman, that of a whole nation employing nearly all its leisure hours from the highest to the lowest rank in reading. Illusion ever danceth attendance upon fear, and this is not the first or the last time that a learned man has been so afflicted, for even intelligent people prefer to believe what they want to believe. This particular illusion is, however, so recurrent as to form a definite complex, to use a tiresome expression. A little later Christopher North gives out that the People will sink under this eternal tuition—the next age, he asserts, will be a generation of idiots; and Tickler adds that among the lower orders reading has grown into a dull disease, that dries up the sap, and slackens the sinews of life.⁴ A few decades

¹ *Religio Medici*. (1642.) Pt. i, Sect. 24. ² 'Against Idle and Desultory Reading', *The Anatomy of Bibliomania*. i, 113–17. ³ Vol. I, Intro. v. The object of the *Retrospective Review* was 'to recall the public from an exclusive attention to new books, by making the merit of old ones the subject of critical discussion'. Intro. viii. ⁴ John Wilson, *Noctes Ambrosianae*. Ed. Ferrier. (1856.) iii, 343.

pass and the illusion of danger grows. In 1874 reading has become a *vulgar detrimental habit, like dram-drinking, a down-right vice*; it is not an education but a *stumbling block, a cloak thrown over ignorance, a softening, demoralising, relaxing practice, which, if persisted in, will end by enfeebling the minds of men and women, making flabby the fibre of their bodies, and undermining the vigour of nations*; unless, he concludes, this tendency is corrected and reading made subsidiary to *thinking, seeing, observing, and energising*, the race cannot escape being split into two divisions, one little removed from invalids, the other scarcely distinguishable from cretins.¹

A little less than a quarter of a century passes and the same fear comes upon us again. Arthur Symons, himself a maker of good books, believes that *the invention of printing helped to destroy literature*; and shutting his eyes to the evidence of his own bookshelves, where the post-manuscript lords of language silently refute him, he gives out that *scribes, and memories not yet spoilt by over-cramming, preserved all the literature that was worth preserving, because books that had to be remembered by heart, or copied with slow, elaborate penmanship, were not thrown away on people who did not want them, but remained in the hands of people of taste.*² And so to complete the chain and to bring this curious illusion home, I add a link from a recent commentator who has little doubt that *we all read too much nowadays and place far too heavy a tax on the assimilative powers of the mind; for just as gluttony defeats the end of healthy physical nourishment, so inordinate reading will simply clog the mind and induce a condition of mental torpor and inactivity; no more efficacious method of*

¹ Anon., 'The Vice of Reading', *Temple Bar.* (1874.) xlvi, 251-7. ² *Studies in Prose and Verse.* (1902.) Intro.

intellectual suicide; and, after the manner of my Jeremiah of 1874, he concludes that unless, as the saying is, something is done about it, *the mighty tide of contemporary printed matter will overwhelm us and whirl us into chattering insanity.*¹

That this is a common opinion is now evident, and it is also clear that its power to endure is as great as that of the people who never are, but always to be, destroyed by reading. So give me leave to consider them not only as misleading but as absurd. If it had been possible to bury mankind beneath an avalanche of books or disintegrate them with false, or even true ideas, all would have been up with us but a little while after the invention of printing. And now I hope I may say that the man who preaches such doctrines is a bibliophobe *malgré lui*, for, in words of good sense which I cull from Glanvill,² *to complain in print of the multitude of Books, seems to me a self-accusing vanity, whilst the querulous Reprehenders add to the cause of complaint, and transgress themselves in that, which they seem to wish amended.* 'Tis true, he says, *the births of the Press are numerous, nor is there less variety in their humors, and phancies of perusers, and while the number of the one exceeds not the diversity of the other, some will not think that too much, which others judge superfluous. The genius of one approves, what another disregardeth. And were nothing to pass the Press, but what were suited to the universal gusto; farewell Typography.* And, putting himself in like case, he frankly avows that were he sole judge he would silence whole *Libraries of Authors, and reduce the world of Books to a fardel: whereas, he hastens to amend, were another to sit Censor, it may be all those I had spared, would be condemn'd to*

¹ A. L. Maycock, 'Bibliophobia', *Blackwood's Magazine*. Oct. 1929. ² *Vanity of Dogmatizing.* (1661.) Pref.

darkness, and obtain no exemption from those ruins, and were all to be supprest, which some think unworthy light; no more would be left than were before Moses, and Trismegistus. Therefore, he seeks no applause from the disgrace of others, nor will he *Huckster-like discredit any man's ware* to recommend his own. Upon which most honourable profession I shall close this topic.

II. THE UNWANTED BOOK

There is no smoke without fire, and the irritation of bookmen at the excess of books is not unwarranted; and although I would be loth to intrude upon bibliophiles any odious ideas of suppression, it is unreasonable to encourage the unwanted book. One notable author, coming forward frankly as a *literary Malthusian*, is of the opinion that since *the ideal world would be that in which there should be at least one lover for each woman, no book should be brought into the world which is not sure of love and lodging on some comfortable shelf.* If writers and publishers only gave a thought to what they are doing when they generate such large families of books, careless as the salmon with its million young, we should have no such sad almshouses as Booksellers' Row, no such melancholy distress sales as remainder auctions.¹ Mary Coleridge thought as much, no doubt, when she congratulated a friend on having no books. Never, O! never, begin to have any, she advises; if you do, they will marry each other, and increase at the rate of half a library per annum. Then, when you have lived in the house forty-five years they have all got grand-children, and there is no room in the house for anything else. The business is put something farther home by P. P. Howe,

¹ Richard Le Gallienne, 'Limited Editions', *Prose Fancies*. (1894.) 121-2.

who, after Malthus, believes that *the prudent check is better than premature mortality*;¹ his method, however, is not the limitation of editions but rather the prevention of indiscriminate conception. That the production of books is often careless when it is not mercenary none will deny, and another reformer will have that *a University should really be an institution to restrict to its most useful minimum both reading and writing*;² and although it is not easy to apply contraceptives to authorship, the mischief is apparent and restraint is necessary. There is no longer cause for fear that such measures might destroy literature or limit knowledge, for whatever argument there may have been in favour of the protection of every book before the discovery of printing, or in the early days of that craft when books were few and their enemies more numerous than their friends, can no longer be advanced. Worthless books are as prolific in these days as vermin and as difficult to exterminate.

Some respectable authorities would go so far as to give out that even when we contemplate the lost literature of the past we can *discern some topics of solace and reconciliation at what seemed a woeful illustration of waste*; for, saith mine author,³ of *what has perished it is probable that a large part was not worth preserving; another part having fulfilled its temporary function has died away; and of another part it may be said, that what was really valuable in it has been insensibly gathered into collective thoughts of educated minds*. But he is careful to point out the difference between ephemeral and durable books. No cause to hoard

¹ Qt. *Malthus and the Publishing Trade*. (1913.) 25. ² Anon., 'The Burden of Books', *Saturday Review*. 3:xi:1906. ³ John Addington Symonds, M.D., 'Waste', *Miscellanies*. (1871.) 65-6.

the greater part of the *literature of science*, for we have absorbed it into the life-stream of our intelligence: *the truths which Newton discovered would remain with us, if his 'Principia' and other treatises had sunk in that fatal river of Time, which, Lord Bacon tells us, drowns what is weighty and precious, and floats down only what is light and worthless. But if the actual 'Odyssey', and 'Hamlet' and 'Paradise Lost', were gone, no one could tell another what they were; the form being no less indispensable than the substance.*

I see danger here for reasons which I have expanded elsewhere, and I confess it is no good argument of itself to say that because a book hath served its purpose it is thenceforth to be cast away, for, if we put all these things together, the loss of the sources of knowledge may end in the loss of knowledge itself; it is as necessary to dig in the past for truth as to cast about for it in the present or the future. But to confess the business openly and freely, I am disposed to deny all such reasonings lest they comfort our enemies with new devices for their fanatic suppressions. Many other bookfolk have been faced with this dilemma, and some of them have advocated a periodical holocaust to relieve the pressure of bookish population, much as some political philosophers advocate war to reduce the number of superfluous people in a state. This argument is particularly applied to accumulations of what are called ephemeral books, for just as those who would reduce population by warfare never think of themselves or their own class as prospective victims, so book-reducers make no attack on their own favourites or upon what they consider the better class of books. They are all out to destroy rubbish, the mental deficient among books or those which have served

their purpose as purveyors or creators of information or entertainment. *It is not merely absurd to keep rubbish merely because it is printed*, says Squire, *it is positively a public duty to destroy it*, because destruction not only makes room for new books, it saves one's heirs the trouble of sorting out the rubbish or storing it, and it may also prevent posterity from making a fool of itself.¹ These provisos of his re-shuffle but do not amend the evil, for the rapid breeding of new books will soon cause unwanted accumulations in other if not the same places, and *the real trouble is not the serious superfluity of bad books, but the inordinate abundance of good books*, wherein lies a problem of the utmost gravity to every member of the reading public.² Bernard Lintot would settle the business by establishing a close-season for reading, and even for buying books, with penalties for illicit reading. Thus, he thinks, people would be forced to cleanse and invigorate their minds, to deepen their imagination, strengthen their souls by direct contact with the life that is about them, rather than be left to continue in the habit of collating a very tiny experience of life with the disproportionately great records to be found within the covers of books.³

Nor can we hope that books with all their intelligence will ever come to limit themselves on Darwinian principles, for although, as Lubbock holds, there is a struggle for existence and a survival of the fittest among books as well as among animals and plants,⁴ it is often found, in civilised communities, that the greatest chance of survival is given to the unfit. So I can think of no remedy save that of Malthus, which Richard Le

¹ 'On Destroying Books', *Life at the Mermaid*. 92. ² Maycock, *Op. cit.*

³ 'Libraries of Living Books', *End-Papers*. 150-1. ⁴ 'Choice of Books', *Pleasures of Life*. i, 72.

Gallienne and Howe advocate, for, as Le Gallienne goes on to argue, and none will gainsay him, a good book is beyond price, far easier to undersell than over-sell, and he looks to the dawning of a day in what would seem to be a Utopia for good bookmen brought about by limiting editions to those who deserve them, and restoring that Golden Age when

. . . a book was still a Book,
Where a wistful man might look,
Finding something through the whole
Breathing—like a human soul.¹

The sum is this: men being so enamoured of destruction, no further encouragement should be given, and since in the long run prevention is better than cure, contraceptives are better than holocausts. I follow, therefore, them that would limit unnecessary production rather than leave things to take their course until it becomes necessary to destroy the product. I know nothing wiser to this end than Howe's generalisation that *a book can have no Right to subsist but only a Power to subsist*.² The incontinent author with his spawn of unwanted books and the meretricious publisher with his mass of rubbish must be malthusianized. The remedy is *Prudential Restraint*, and forasmuch as few can embrace this counsel, all bookmen of goodwill should resist the temptation to encourage indiscriminate book-breeding that can end only by turning a bookshop into a slum.

III. THE BIBLIOPHOBE DISCOURAGED

Now, from the foregoing discourse, I shall deduce some corollaries that may be of use for the better understanding of

¹ Austin Dobson, *Poetical Works*. 170. ² *Malthus and the Publishing Trade*. 21.

the whole matter and its further consideration, for what greater madness can there be than for a man to take upon him to be a God in such matters, as some do? I profess myself an impartial lover of all books, and do presume every book to be good until I have found it otherwise, and even then I curb my distrust, knowing, as I have said, that the bad book of to-day may be the good book of to-morrow, provided always that it is a book, and not one of those fabrications which so frequently in all times masquerade as books, for, as Jean Cocteau says,¹ *when a work of art appears to be in advance of its period, it is really the period that has lagged behind the work of art.* No such thing, Hartley Coleridge stiffly maintains,² *as a worthless book, though some are more than worthless; no book which is not worth preserving, if its existence can be tolerated,* as some men are proper to be hanged but none left to starve. But he is a timid doctrinaire, overloaded with provisos, and in the end slips into a smug compromise; *let no book perish*, he advises, but immediately recants with *unless it be such an one as it is your duty to throw into the fire.*

Duty is a dangerous doctrine, a most destructive invention, and more good books have been destroyed or suppressed in its name than under any other influence save religion. In all ages, as I have sufficiently shown, good men for good reasons have condemned good books. Reason is no guide. There is no generally acceptable definition of obscenity: *the state of our own neurosis, in which the greatest variation is to be found, determines where we would draw the line at obscenity per se.* No two expurgators have ever been known to agree.³ Duty is no remedy. Duty

¹'Cock and Harlequin', *A Call to Order*. 8. ²'William Roscoe', *Biographia Borealis*. ³Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . .* 209.

arises at first, a gloomy tyranny, out of man's helplessness, his self-mistrust, in a word, his abstract fear.¹ So, I say again, men must take their chance with books, as books do with men: *Chance, in the last resort, is God;*² and Swinburne believed that to destroy with all due speed any destructible person or book not worthy to last is no injury to any one, but the greatest service that can be done to book and writer, not less than to the rest of the poor world, yet he was wiser when he said that what is fit to live is safe to live, and whatever is not fit to live is sure to die, though all men should swear and struggle to the contrary;³ and, further, we may console ourselves with Vauvenargues when he observes that mediocre minds do not feel the extremes of good and evil,⁴ and with Garrod, who reminds us that in the long run, in books and in life alike, morality can be trusted to look after itself.⁵ If it were otherwise there would be small hope for us, for our advisers are past masters in the art of contradiction; there is no agreement one way or the other. There is hardly a single philosophical or theological book, says Voltaire, in which heresies and impieties may not be found by misinterpreting, or adding to, or subtracting from the sense.⁶ Nor is venality necessary for such misconduct; ignorance and natural mental defect serve equally well for those who fear books. I would engage, bragged Dr. Tamponet, to find a multitude of heresies in the Lord's Prayer, if this prayer, which we know to have come from the divine mouth, were now for the first time published by a Jesuit.⁷

¹ G. Bernard Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism.* (1891.) 16. ² Anatole France, *Garden of Epicurus.* Trans. Allinson. 116. ³ *Under the Microscope.* (1872.) 20-1. ⁴ *Selections.* Trans. Lee. (1903.) 174. ⁵ 'How to Know a Good Book from a Bad', *Profession of Poetry.* 263. ⁶ 'Books,' *Phil. Dict.*

⁷ Qt. Voltaire. *Ib.*

The Platonists of the time of the Emperor Julian exhibited a like ingenuity when they *professed to reveal the system of the universe by mystic tales or symbols.* They could, saith Gibbon, extract from any fable any sense which was adapted to their favourite system of religion and philosophy; thus the lascivious form of a naked Venus was tortured into the discovery of some moral precept, or some physical truth; and the castration of Atys explained the revolution of the sun between the tropics, or the separation of the human soul from vice and error.¹ Much the same attitude is adopted by many who have escaped even from theological and political prejudices, so that no book is safe from *Opinion and her children, Noise and Impudence, Dullness, Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry, and Ill-manners.*²

But if (*fie of such a but*), I say it out of Sir Philip Sidney,³ *you be born so near the dull-making Cataphract of Nilus that you cannot hear the planet-like music of poetry, or any other writings whatsoever, if you have so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry, if you cannot dissever gold from dross, then, I say, as he said to his indifferent poet, though I will not wish unto you the ass's ears of Midas, nor to be driven by a poet's verses (as Bubonax was) to hang himself, nor to be rhymed to death, as is said to be done in Ireland; yet thus much curse I must send you, in the behalf of all poets, that while you live, you live in love, and never get favour for lacking skill of a sonnet, and, when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph.* Yet when they have all had their say, the gold is better than the dross of literature, *nothing so good for us as the best books, but, as Garrod continues it, heaven save us from the ambition to be saints of literary study; let us preserve enough*

¹ *Decline and Fall.* xxiii. ² Swift, *Battle of the Books.* ³ *Apologie for Poetrie.*

adventure to want to rub shoulders with bad books.¹ Our love is our best protector, and come what can come, I am prepared to allege that the chivalrous man who loves one woman will in return for so great a blessing respect all, even the veriest drab; so will the true bibliophile, whatever his personal preferences, respect all books, even the worst.

To be tolerant is wise and justified by time. Even if we could discover a universal and reliable test of bawdry or obscenity it would not help. Suppression and persecution are fertilisers. You can't make people virtuous by Act of Parliament. *On the very first day on which the restraint of fear is taken away, and on which men can venture to say what they think, a frightful peal of blasphemy and ribaldry proclaims that the short-sighted policy which aimed at making a nation of saints has made a nation of scoffers.*² We have an instance in that outbreak of ribaldry which was the Restoration's reply to the moral tyranny of Cromwell's Puritans; and Macaulay helps me to clinch this argument with a final example from France. *It was thus, he says, in France about the beginning of the eighteenth century, Louis the Fourteenth in his old age became religious: he determined that his subjects should be religious too: he shrugged his shoulders and knitted his brows if he observed at his levée or near his dinner-table any gentleman who neglected the duties enjoined by the church, and rewarded piety with blue ribands, invitations to Marli, governments, pensions, and regiments. Forthwith Versailles became, in everything but dress, a convent. The pulpits and confessionals were surrounded by swords and embroidery. The Marshals of France were much in prayer; and there was hardly one among the*

¹ 'How to Know a Good Book from a Bad', *Profession of Poetry*. 265.

² Macaulay, 'Leigh Hunt', *Essays*. (1872.) 575-6.

*Dukes and Peers who did not carry good little books in his pocket, fast during Lent, and communicate at Easter. Madame de Maintenon, who had a great share in the blessed work, boasted that devotion had become quite the fashion. A fashion indeed it was; and like a fashion it passed away. No sooner had the old king been carried to St. Denis than the whole court unmasked. Every man hastened to indemnify himself, by the excess of licentiousness and impudence, for years of mortification. The same persons who, a few months before, with meek voices and demure looks, had consulted divines about the state of their souls, now surrounded the midnight table where, amidst the bounding of champagne corks, a drunken prince, enthroned between Dubois and Madame de Parabère, hiccupped out atheistical arguments and obscene jests.*¹

Many reasons I could give against all such moral fears, for as Ernst and Seagle advise us, *obscenity is only a superstition of the day—the modern counterpart of ancient witchcraft;*² but when all is said *pro* and *con*, Milton's³ rule is best, that since *a wise man, like a good refiner, can gather gold out of the drossiest volume, and that a fool will be a fool with the best book, yea, or without a book, there is no reason that we should deprive a wise man of any advantage to his wisdom, while we seek to restrain from a fool that which being restrained will be no hindrance to his folly;* for the rest most who have feared and desired to suppress books are of the order of Caliban, they know their power to undo what they would have, and act as he did in his war with Prospero, *remember, he advised,*

First to possess his books; for without them
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command: they all do hate him
As rootedly as I. Burn but his books.⁴

¹ Macaulay, *Ib.* 576. ² *To the Pure . . . 10.* ³ *Areopagitica.* c. 65. ⁴ *The Tempest.* iii, 2.

So I condemn all those fanatics who seek to suppress or expurgate what they disapprove, *to gnaw out the choicest periods of exquisite Books, and to commit such a treacherous fraud against the orphan remainders of worthiest men after death*, for by such acts of vandalism *the more sorrow will belong to that hapless race of men, whose misfortune it is to have understanding.*¹

No marriage so compact as that of a fool and his folly. For the rest, to follow our disposition, as Robert Burton² adviseth out of *Cardan*,³ in the matter of eating, to eat sometimes of a dish which is hurtful is not amiss, if we have an extraordinary liking to it; and although I concede that raw meats, still more those that be high or gamey, are not always good for queasy stomachs, I conclude with him that our own experience is the best physician; that diet which is most propitious to one is often pernicious to another, as *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, though read by thousands without harm, confirmed and justified the poet Francis Thompson in his predilection for laudanum; *doubtless it was De Quincy who first showed to Francis the profitableness of bitter experiences, and that, if gallant prose might come of weakness, poetry might be sown in the fields of failure, and the crown of thorns be turned to the chaplet of laurel,*⁴ thus transmuting evil into good; but such is the variety of palates, humours and temperatures, let every man observe and be a law unto himself. Stanley Baldwin rejoices in the good fortune that permitted him as a boy to range over his father's library and find his own provender. *If, he advises, you do that with a child, he will always take the nourishment that*

¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 108-9. ² *Anat. of Melan.* (1904.) ii, 33. ³ *Tract. 6. Contradict*, 1, lib. 1. ⁴ Everard Meynell, *Francis Thompson*. 50.

*is suitable to him, just as when you look over a meadow over which cattle are grazed you will find certain grasses are taken and certain are rejected: the cow knows what is good for her. It is the same with the child, he will take the right sustenance and thrive on it.*¹ Tiberius, in *Tacitus*, did laugh at all such as after thirty years of age would ask counsel of others concerning matters of diet. I say the same of those who cannot withstand the dangers of books; and even if, as Thomas à Kempis warns us, *books speak alike to all, but all are not qualified to be taught by them alike;*² readers must take their chance or run the greater risk of losing all those advantages, joys, attainments, etc., which come from books; and they may do so with the more confidence, in that, as Garrod maintains, *the great artist in literature rarely tempts us beyond what we are able to bear.*³

That story of Dionysius Alexandrinus which Milton tells⁴ is perpendicular to this theme. That learned and pious man *had wont to avail himself against Hereticks by being conversant in their Books, until a certain Presbyter laid it scrupulously to his conscience, how he durst venture himself among those defiling volumes.* Dionysius, loath to give offence, fell into a new debate with himself, when a vision sent from God confirmed his reading in these words: *Read any Books whatever come to thy hands, for thou art sufficient both to judge aright, and to examine each matter.* To this revelation he assented the sooner, because it was answerable to that of the Apostle to the Thessalonians: *Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*⁵ And, Milton well says, he might have added yet another distinguished saying of the

¹ 'Books', *Our Inheritance*. 268. ² *Imitation of Christ*. Trans. Stanhope. Universal Lib. 217. ³ 'How to Know a Good Book from a Bad', *Profession of Poetry*. 257. ⁴ *Areopagitica*. Ed. Holt White. 56–60. ⁵ 1 Thess. v, 21.

same author: *To the pure all things are pure, not only meats and drinks, but all kinde of knowledge whether of good or evill; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the Books, if the will and conscience be not defil'd.* He compares books to meats and viands, *some of good, some of evill substance;* but, he argues, *wholesome meats to a vitiated stomach differ little or nothing from unwholesome; and best Books to a naughty mind are not unappliable to occasions of Evill;* and bad meats differ from bad books in that the one will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction, the other, as in the case of worthy Dionysius Alexandrinus, and other discreet and judicious readers, *serve to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate;* he therefore would leave men for the most part free to choose their own books, for *when God did enlarge the universal diet of man's body, saving ever the rules of Temperance, he then also, as before, left arbitrary the dyeting and repasting of our minds; as wherein every mature man might have to exercise his own leading capacity;* 'tis a great trust committed to us by God without particular law or prescription, *wholly to the demeanour of every grown man.*

Reading is an adventure; the contemplation of truth itself, as Richard de Bury tells us plainly, *is never more perfect than in a book;*¹ and no principle more necessary to its contemplation than Tolerance, æsthetical no less than ethical. *I have room enough in my brain to admire,* saith Coleridge,² *the head and fancy of Akenside, the heart and fancy of Bowles, the solemn lordliness of Milton, the divine chit-chat of Cowper;* and *whatever a man's excellence is, that will be likewise his fault;* and although John Milton advertised³ that a true poem (or for that matter any

¹ *Philobiblon.* Trans. Thomas. 17. ² *Letters.* Ed. E. H. Coleridge. i, 197.

³ *An Apology for Smectymnuus.*

other piece of writing) is *a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things*, the poet not presuming to sing *high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praise-worthy*, he was not averse from reading those books which to many others have been *the fuel of Wantonness and loose Living*, but which (*by Divine Indulgence, he thinks*) proved to him so many *Incitements to the love and steadfast Observation of that Virtue which abhors the Society of Bordelloes*; and Gifford was in the same state, if we are to believe a smug commentator¹ who claimed that *high religious feeling, being a marked trait in Mr. Gifford's character, and a necessary accompaniment of genius in its highest sense*, enabled him to read the plays of Ford with impunity, and *to walk through the occasional impurities and even profanities of our earlier stage, unpolluted himself, and ever watchful to keep contamination from others*; and if religion is absent or ineffectual *we must assume that familiarity produces a satisfactory sexual antitoxin*.² If such experiences be true, and I have no reason to doubt them, they should in themselves tend to allay all fear of books, and put the bibliophobe into a higher form where he may learn *the Second Reverence for things around*; as the poet orders:

Up, then, and go amongst them; don't be timid;
 Look at them quietly a bit: by-and-by
 Respect will come, and heal thy appetite.³

¹ Plays. Ford. Intro. Family Ed. ² Ernst and Seagle, *To the Pure . . . 19.*

³ A. H. Clough, 'Dipsychus', *Poems.* (1892.) 157.

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